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“ THE WINDOW OF THE GREAT PARLOUR.”

See page 405.

ELLIE:

NOTHING PERFECT HERE.

A Tale for Girls

BY K. M. W.

"I thank Thee most for my dear boy
Who has my life begun;
And shall I thank Thee for the girl
That has my life begun?
And shall I thank Thee for the girl
Who has my life begun?"

ALICE M. W.

LONDON

WILLIAM MACKENZIE & SONS

11, ABchurch Lane, E.C. 4

1898

Printed by W. M. Mackenzie & Sons



ELLIE ;

OR,

NOTHING PERFECT HERE.

A Tale for Girls.

BY K. M. W.

"I thank Thee *more* that all our joy
Is touched with pain ;
That shadows fall on brightest hours ;
That thorns remain ;
So that earth's bliss may be our guide
And not our chain."

A. A. PROCTER.

LONDON :
WILLIAM MACINTOSH,
24, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1865.

250. 0. 159.

WILLIAM MACINTOSH,
24, PATERNOSTER-ROW, LONDON.



TO THE
LOVED MEMORY OF LUCY,

THE
Following Pages

ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

ELLIE ;

OR, NOTHING PERFECT HERE.

CHAPTER I.

"SARAH is quite right—you must go to bed like a good little girl. So no fretting, Ellie ! Give Mama one kiss, and then run away. Just think what we have before us to-morrow ! You ought to have been asleep a full hour ago."

The littered room—one side crowded with finished packages, the centre cumbered by a chest which "Mama" on her knees was vigorously packing ; a comfortless supper, disputing its right to table-room with a host of valuables waiting their turn for admission to the chest ;—all combined to make clear *what* was in anticipation for the morrow.

From out this scene of confusion the lady turned as she spoke to look upon "Ellie," whose small, white face was puckered up, while one hand was ominously rubbing away at an eye, the visible companion of which looked weary enough, and as if it

might with advantage have been shut up "a full hour" before.

But Ellie had not long been wearing that doleful face. Full of the delightful journey so near at hand, she had been running up and down to "help" the whole day through, her arms filled with such weights as they had strength to carry, and her thoughts with pretty white cottages, shady lanes, and violets. But she was fairly tired out now, and especially disinclined to believe in *sleep* as a cure for her troubles. So, having received a hint from the maid that it was "high time to think of Bedfordshire," she had hurried away to get reprieve from "Mama," and was met by the speech we have recorded.

The fretting would most probably at this juncture have assumed a more energetic tone, but at the moment a portly figure appeared in the doorway, a decided hand began unfastening the small intricacies of Ellie's dress; and, when this was completed, the same hand hurried her out into the passage, and an unrelenting voice said, "There now, child! you can do the rest yourself. Run upstairs, and make haste and get to sleep, and — I say, Elspy! don't you touch the candle!"

Grandmama Woodford was not a person to be trifled with. So Ellie trudged upstairs, wishing that she could be revenged on Grandmama for this abrupt dismissal, and on Mama, too, for not interfering to prevent it. She could think of nothing within her power, however, but to set the house on fire (an idea suggested by the caution about the candle just given from below), or to wake Willie. As the first of these expedients might, it happily occurred to her, have

interfered with the journey, a loud stamping on the staircase made known that Ellie had decided on the latter. In this she would probably have succeeded speedily, but an angry whisper from the voice which had last spoken, brought her to a sudden pause.

“Leave off that noise, Elspy, this moment, or I shall be after you!”

Ellie gave a subdued sob, with a hearty desire to make it a loud scream, and hurried into the bedroom.

Her stormy thoughts, as she entered, were hastily diverted by a well-known sound, which now seemed to be uttered close to her—

“Past nine o’clock!”

A candle was in the room, and a dim street-lamp was burning beneath the window; but Ellie was alone, and she knew by that sound that that terrible creature—the watchman—was just outside the house.

Who should speak to Ellie of protection derived from the watchman? To her he seemed a species of ogre, whose nightly employ was to carry off refractory children, and who derived his knowledge of their misdoings by some unaccountable means, very alarming to think about!

Ellie thought of her intended revenge, and settled in her own mind that the watchman thought of it too. “Suppose,” she said to herself, “he should come in and carry me off, and I shouldn’t go to Stockington after all!” She listened tremblingly. The sounds were repeated often,—“Past nine o’clock!” But Ellie observed that each time they grew fainter than before, and, when they really died

away, she gave a sigh of relief, and scrambled into bed as fast as possible.

“Ellie was a silly little thing!” is your verdict, my young reader. Quite true, she — but you shall hear her story.

Just as Ellie made her appearance in this world, sorrow fell on her home. Reverse of fortune came ; a long train of distresses followed, and the mother’s health failed under the shock of many calamities. The care of little Ellie, therefore, devolved chiefly on servants, who soon discovered that it would be easier to frighten than to coax their young charge into submission. Absurd stories were invented to work upon her sensitive nature ; and all being implicitly believed, a crowd of baseless fears arose in her mind, and how to defend herself under highly improbable circumstances was a question continually occupying her private cogitations.

But now a new era was about to begin. She was going away—far away from noisy, smoky London ; and in that fairy-land of her day-dreams, which in common prose language she called “the country,” there would surely be no dangers. Once safely through this last night, all her troubles would cease ; in which comfortable conviction she dried her eyes, and laid her head on her pillow.

The cold February morning found Ellie as little disposed to leave her bed as she had been to go to it the evening before. A jerk and a pettish reply revealed the state of her mind when Sarah appeared at her bedside ; she was, however, thoroughly aroused by hearing a certain voice say—

“Well, let her alone, Sarah. Her mother can go

without her ; and then, when she comes to live with *me*, we'll see about the getting up in the morning."

This terrible suggestion drove away all further desire for sleep, and Ellie was soon battling with cold water and refractory buttons with right good will.

The journey was to begin in the afternoon, and would not reach its close till the following midday.

Grandmama and Sarah both accompanied the travellers to the inn from which the coach started.

Ellie had never yet travelled further than to Cowley, a village a few miles from London, where Aunt Jessie lived. This journey to Stockington, therefore, was in all respects an important event in her life. Fully impressed with this fact, she jumped into the comfortless vehicle with a combined feeling of awe for the wonder it was about to perform in conveying her from that dirty, narrow street to the Elysium her fancy pictured, and of condescending pity for Grandmama and Sarah, who were to remain behind.

There she was left to take care of Willie, and extricate herself from the straw as she best could, while the others looked after the various packages.

The last "good-bye" was said, and the passengers were waiting for the expected "All right!" and the sound of the whip, when a gentleman appeared at the coach window, and, saying hurriedly, "We're only just in time, I see; here, children, jump in!" the coach door was opened, and two little girls stepped into it.

The gentleman then, with an apology to Mrs. Woodford for the liberty he took, requested her

guardianship over them for as long as they might be her fellow-travellers. The promise was given, and the coach drove off.

The new companions appeared to be near Ellie's own age ; but, unlike herself, they were evidently accustomed travellers, and at once began, with an air of experience, to make preparations for the journey, giving Mrs. Woodford, as they did so, a sketch of their history, past and prospective.

They were born, they said, in Jamaica, and had been brought to England for education. Papa and Mama had fixed on a school for them which was near London, but they were going first to visit an aunt at Murfield. They would see Papa and Mama once more, and then not again, perhaps, for many years, for they were not to go back to Jamaica till they were seventeen or eighteen.

Thus they chatted on, and on sped the horses ; Ellie divided, meanwhile, between interest in the conversation of the sisters, and pleasure in watching from the window the many new, and to her strange objects, which met her eye as the journey advanced.

When daylight began to fade, however, the sisters absorbed all Ellie's attention. A light supper having been unpacked and eaten, a valise was next unfastened, and from it were taken brushes, curl-papers, and—night-caps ! Night-caps in a coach ! Were they what every one should be provided with, and was it only because Mama didn't know what was proper that Ellie's own and Willie's had not been brought ? Ellie watched with fixed attention, meditating on the subject of the night-caps,

till it became so dark that she could only *hear* that brushes and paper were being restored to the valise.

Willie had fallen asleep ; Ellie, too, and her companions, gradually sank into deep slumber. At length all were suddenly aroused with a start, as the coach rolled rapidly over stones, took a sharp turn, amidst glancing lights, and came to a stand.

The coach door was briskly opened by a man without a hat, and something white under his arm, who said—

“ Now, ladies, an hour allowed for breakfast.”

“ A bitter morning, isn’t it, Mum ? ” he added, as Mrs. Woodford raised Willie in her arms, and prepared to alight.

Morning ! Breakfast ! Why, the stars were shining, and there was not a streak of daylight to be seen.

The sisters hastily put on their bonnets over the night-caps ; Ellie made a feeble attempt at doing something towards the adjustment of her own dress, and, with a discontented face at being thus rudely disturbed from her sleep, and strong disbelief in “ breakfast at that time of night,” she followed the others into the Inn.

But discontent gave place to satisfaction, as the man who had led them into the house threw open a door, and disclosed a large room fragrant with tea and coffee, where the brightest of fires was blazing, and where a well-spread table was awaiting them.

Ellie became animated at once, pushed back the curls from her face, kissed Willie, and spoke a shy

word or two to the sisters, who hurried to the fire, and made themselves thoroughly at home without delay.

The outside passengers flocked in, all looking very cold. Each, as he entered, cast an amused glance at the night-caps ; but the "night-caps," in no sort disconcerted, smiled in return, and soon the whole party were seated round the table.

It was delightful—besides being so wonderful and unbelievable a thing—to be sitting, in the middle of a cold winter's night, in a strange room, with such a fire and such a breakfast before them ; and Ellie started with one of her own vehement expressions of displeasure, hardly checked by the presence of the strangers, when a burly form appeared at the door, and the coachman, who had evidently been doing justice to creature-comforts somewhere, said—

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, coach starts in five minutes, if *you* please."

There was a hurried and general move, a drawing on of wraps, and, with a shiver, and a lingering glance behind them, they all took up their old places in the coach, the bright room and well-spread board seeming like a pleasant dream from which they had just been reluctantly awakened.

On they drove again. One by one the stars went out ; morning dawned ; and somewhere about that hour which they were all accustomed to think a suitable one for breakfast, Mrs. Woodford and Ellie shook hands with their companions, and saw them drive off with a young lady, whom they greeted joyously, and called "Cousin Mary."

For a moment Ellie watched them with regret ;

but, as the journey drew towards its close, she was too deeply absorbed in picturing to herself the delights of her country home, to leave any place in her mind for regret. One cottage after another was fixed on, as they drove along, as the very one she would wish her own home to be like ; and she was deep in a prudential speculation as to whether it would be safe and desirable to have beehives in front of it, when her mother startled her by saying—

“Look on this side, Ellie. Do you see that high rock, with the Castle on the top ? I believe that is Stockington Castle ; and those houses, I suspect, are the beginning of the town : so we shall soon see Papa.”

Ten minutes more—a few turnings in the road—the coach rolled under an old arched gateway, down one street, and stopped. It was Papa’s hand which hastily unfastened the door, and his voice that gave the travellers their first word of welcome.

Mr. Woodford had been in Stockington for some months past. The promise of employment had induced him to go there alone, till it should seem prudent to summon his family to join him. But even now, it was inclination, rather than prudence, which guided him in the summons.

But there they were ;—his beautiful wife—still beautiful, though her face bore marks of care—and that little cherub on her lap ! Looking on them, he felt that he could, for this day at least, put care and anxiety aside.

To Ellie his welcome was brief and cold. The time of her entrance into life had been one not only

of reverse of fortune. That sorrow had been attended by circumstances more galling than poverty, to her father's mind; and the delicate babe, which he could only look on as an additional anxiety, found no place in his love. None of the tenderness which marked his conduct to his other children fell to Ellie's share. Rose was his darling till Willie came; and he took so little pains to conceal from Ellie his preference for his firstborn, that, had the children been thrown much together in early life, the effect of this preference might have been injurious to the minds of both. At the time of Mr. Woodford's misfortunes, however, Rose had been adopted by Mrs. Woodford's sister; the children, therefore, had hitherto met but seldom, and were now for a long time to be separated.

The first greetings over, and the packages collected, the travellers gave themselves up to Papa's guidance, and preceded the luggage to the spot which had so long occupied Ellie's dreams, both in her sleeping and waking moments. She hurried along to keep up with her parents, hustled by the passers, and staring into the shop windows, wondering when the shops and the houses would cease, and the fields become visible, till all of a sudden her father made a turn, walked briskly about half-way up a narrow yard, and stopped before a small house, the door of which stood open, and into which he presently entered.

The yard was paved. There was no thoroughfare; and high warehouse-buildings rose gloomily opposite the small, stiff dwelling, which appeared to be the only residence near.



Within the house, however, things wore a more cheerful aspect. All looked fresh and beautifully clean. A bright fire blazed and crackled its welcome, and a table was spread for dinner, its centre occupied by a raised pie.

But neither cheerful room nor tempting dish could draw a smile to the little white face, which, in blank and half unbelieving dismay, was turned from father to mother as if for explanation of this tremendous overthrow of the day-dreams. Ellie dared not utter a word, for she saw her father's eye upon her; and a proposal that the travellers should go upstairs and prepare for dinner, gave a momentary turn to her thoughts.

All that master and maid could do to make the house look comfortable, had been done—the mother needed not to be told this; and whatever her private feelings might have been respecting the situation of her new home, she allowed no trace of disappointment to be seen on her face, which wore a happy smile altogether astonishing, and not a little provoking to Ellie.

“Mama,” whispered the child, as soon as her father left the room, “why do you look so pleased? It's a nasty, horrid, dismal place, and I want to go away. It's worse than London. There's nothing to be seen—not even a bit of grass. It was very unkind and naughty of Papa to come here.”

“Hush! Ellie, hush! You musn't speak like that of dear Papa. I know you are disappointed, and I am sorry for you; but suppose we try to make the best of it, and believe that all will turn out better than the first appearance leads us to

expect—a circumstance which often happens in life, I assure you. If the yard outside looks gloomy, I don't think you can say that the parlour does so too."

"I don't care about *rooms*, Mama, a bit. I never once thought about *them* when we were coming here. I only wanted there to be fields all round the house, and cows and sheep, and shady lanes where violets and primroses grow, like you told me about in London. I have never seen them growing in my whole life; and now I thought I really should, and then when I could write I should tell Rose about them, and now I shan't have *one single thing* to tell her about!"

"Not 'one single thing,' but *so many*, that I don't know when Ellie will be clever enough with her pen to put them all down on paper for Rose's amusement! Now, just believe what Mama says, and see if even before this time to-morrow you have not found out *something* that you would like to tell Rose. There, put aside the bonnet and pelisse; wash that little miserable face, and then we will go and find out what that great pie is made of. No, don't talk any more at present; wait till you feel thoroughly refreshed. Let us put off what is disagreeable to us till we are in a better condition for looking at it."

So saying, Mrs. Woodford hastily changed her dress, and then went out of the room, leaving Ellie to follow.

"That is a particularly nice-looking raised pie," Mrs. Woodford observed, as they seated themselves round the dinner-table. "Where did it come from?"

"Yes, I daresay it's good," said her husband. "Mrs. Tiverton sent it. I couldn't help her knowing you were coming. They live just at the bottom of the yard. I was obliged to be near the counting-house, you know."

"Couldn't help it!" said Mrs. Woodford, laughing, "did you wish to do so?"

"Why yes, I did. I want none of their attentions or favours. Whatever I have of them I'll work for."

"But suppose they should honour *me* with their attentions?"

"That will be the case I've no doubt, if you submit to accept them."

"Well, I shall certainly 'submit to accept' a bit of that pie, so please to give me a good slice. Do you see much of them?"

"Of whom,—the women?"

"Of Mr. Tiverton's family generally."

"No, certainly *not*. They've asked me there often; but I've never been, and don't mean to go. Well, Ellie, what do you think of your new home?"

Ellie was sitting, forgetful of the plate before her, with her eyes fixed on the small portion of sky which the window commanded, wondering how far off the fields and shady lanes might be, the tears ready to appear on the shortest notice. This question, therefore, was too much. It came so closely on the overthrow of her hopes, that although the dread of her father generally made her conceal her feelings in his presence, they overcame her now, and she replied in tones more indignant and

reproachful than she herself understood, "It *isn't* country, Papa!"

"Oh! that's it, is it? I thought you looked glum. Well, my dear, we must send her to Botany Bay; perhaps that will be 'country' enough to please her."

To send her to Botany Bay was an old and once terrible threat of her father's. But it had evidently lost its power now; for after a moment's swelling of the throat, Ellie made a dart at her pocket-handkerchief, rubbed away her tears, drew her plate towards her, and unceremoniously began her dinner.

Her father glanced towards her, and was about to speak again, when the mother interposed,—

"Ellie is tired now, Papa, and can't look on the bright side of anything. To-morrow she is going to find out how many pleasant things there are here, which Rose must be told about."

This did not prove as successful a diversion from impending difficulties as Mrs. Woodford intended; for Mr. Woodford at once began to enlarge upon the amiable way in which Rose would have met a disappointment. A beseeching look from his wife, however, checked him; and then, taking Willie from his chair and placing him on his father's knee, she asked, as she stroked her husband's cheek, whether he thought he remembered how to nurse after being so long out of practice. The device succeeded; and the father became wholly absorbed in little Willie.

And now, while the mother is telling of the recent journey and old friends, the reader may like a sketch

of the Woodford family. To make it complete Rose shall be fetched from Cowley, and take her place in the picture.

The father is a fine-looking man, in middle life. The expression of his face is variable, but not often pleasing. His early training launched him on maturer life self-willed and undisciplined, already prepared to fall beneath temptation. Quickly enough it came. He strayed from the safe and happy path; and when both fortune and peace of mind were lost, he looked upon himself as "more sinned against than sinning."

Yet with all the wrong there is one redeeming point in his character. Family affection is powerful in his heart, and is his wife's stronghold at all times. She is several years younger than her husband. Her face speaks of a kindliness of heart, a refinement of taste and feeling even more attractive than its beauty. Many tolerate the proud, repulsive father for love of her.

Rose, the bright joyous firstborn, strongly resembles her father in many points. The same rich curls and glowing cheeks as his have been in early youth, are hers. But all is softened and refined; and on the young face there sits that happy expression,

"Which marks security to please,"

and which speaks of a gaiety of heart that sorrow has never touched.

A striking contrast to anxious, fretful, little Ellie; whose blue eyes tell out every movement of the inner self, where storms and sunshine hurry by most April-

like, and in whose moral structure all that is yet hopeful lies in the *loving* spirit which the clouds so often obscure.

And last—the youngest, he who bears the magic name of “Baby” in his home. He is a little one who seems as if all that is fair or sweet in parents or sisters had met and centered in himself !

CHAPTER II.

THE "nasty, horrid, dismal " yard turned out less destitute of attraction than Ellie had foreboded on her first introduction to it.

The freedom it afforded for a run with Willie at any hour of the day she soon acknowledged to be pleasant. The best parlour, too (prospectively so called), made, in its unfurnished state, a romping-place for wet days. So at least Ellie had more space in her new home than had ever fallen to her share before.

Mrs. Tiverton made an early call, bringing with her her youngest daughter, who, though several years older than Ellie, seemed determined to be friendly with her, and talked of the walks they would take in the spring, and the pleasant hours they would spend together, even before the winter was gone.

Sarah, the new maid, was gentle and kind, and ready to please the children always.

Thus insensibly the pleasant things revealed themselves, and the disappointment, if not forgotten, grew less keen.

Lessons were begun before long ; and neither Ellie

nor her mother were slow in discovering that change of *place* only could not suffice to make crooked things straight, or rough places plain. Those nightly fears, too ! They had not been left in London, as Ellie hoped they would be. But they took a new form. A few judicious words from Sarah on the subject of the watchman had dissipated the delusions respecting *him*, and other groundless apprehensions had been similarly allayed. But now the dread of losing her mother became Ellie's one absorbing anxiety. This was, however, a trouble which she eventually kept mostly to herself ; for, having on one occasion told Sarah of it, she had only replied by saying, " Well, my dear, if you *are* so fond of your Mama, what a pity it is you go off into such passions, and vex her so. Perhaps if you were a good girl to her by day, you'd be happier about her at night." For this kind of remedy Ellie was not disposed to make any exertion, and she henceforth bore the trouble in silence.

The dreary days of winter which succeeded the arrival at Stockington were cheered by the kindness of the Tiverton family. Mr. Woodford, indeed, retained his haughty reserve towards them, and he could rarely be brought to show complacency in the attentions paid to his wife and children. But the elders of the family knew his past history, and made charitable allowance for his present moroseness.

The female part of the Tiverton family consisted of the mother—a kind-hearted old lady ; three grown-up daughters—tall, stiff, and proper exceedingly ; and the young girl whom we have already mentioned.



The father of the family largely shared his wife's geniality, and Mr. Woodford often found it difficult to maintain his own proud, distant manner, when met by the hearty good-will habitually shown him by the kind old gentleman.

There were two sons absent from home, and with these the circle was complete.

Mrs. Tiverton soon discovered that although now her inferior in position, Mrs. Woodford was her superior in all besides, and treated her with a delicacy and politeness which indicated her own good breeding. It seemed, indeed, to be the delight of the whole family, when the painful stiffness of the first interview was over, to show the Woodfords every attention in their power.

Stockington was a busy manufacturing town. It possessed a large market-place of recent date, surrounded by colonnades, under which shops were ranged. But there was little of modern construction beyond this. Time-worn walls and venerable gateways showed themselves in all directions as soon as a turn from the market-place was made. Even the names of the streets themselves proved that they were relics of times gone by.

On the outskirts of the town stood the old Castle, built on the edge of a rock which towered high above all surrounding objects, and descended precipitously in huge, broken masses, till at its base it was washed by a broad and shallow stream.

The Park spread out its green slopes and wide pathways near the Castle rock, and beyond these, at easy walking distances, were dotted charm-

ing villages, each a treat in itself to visit and explore.

Many pleasant walks were taken as the spring advanced.

But there remained one spot—the choicest the neighbourhood afforded (a spot, too, of so much interest to the Woodford family in after years, that it claims especial description)—not yet visited.

To do this justice, a long summer afternoon would be required. The expedition was, therefore, postponed until the days should have reached their utmost length. Willie's birthday was in June; and that day, it was decided, should be honoured by a visit to Wilton.

Ellie's slumbers were much disturbed the night before the 20th of June, by anxiety about the weather. She was, therefore, relieved, when Sarah appeared at her bedside in the morning, and reported favourably.

They started after an early dinner; Sarah carrying Willie, and Ellie skipping about from him to her mother, in the highest spirits, scarcely checked even by her father's presence.

Their course lay for near half-a-mile along the high road which led to the next town. This passed, broad meadows spread themselves before the pedestrians. Then water, gleaming from amongst dark trees, appeared, and soon they had reached the margin of a stately river. Fringed by richly wooded banks, it meandered away till the eye could trace it no longer; and there, nestling in a break of the thick foliage, lay the village to which Ellie and her companions were bound.

As the scene burst upon her view, the child stood in silent admiration, with eyes directed to the opposite bank.

From the river's edge stretched out the village green, encircled by broken groups of cottages, thatch-roofed, white-walled, and covered with monthly roses in full bloom.

A little church stood towards the right, at the furthest extremity of the green; its consecrated ground enclosed by a rustic paling. Several old yew-trees grew about it; their dark tints contrasting well with the bright and varied ones supplied by a grove of forest trees beyond, which formed on that side a background to the picture, and threw into distinct view the simple beauty of the sacred building. A cluster of cottages stood hard by the churchyard palings. Then came a hedgerow, where the wild rose and woodbine, mingling together, seemed vying in luxuriance with their more cultivated neighbours. The blooming fence was succeeded by the outbuildings of the inn, before which stood the village well, the horse-trough, and a seat for travellers—all shadowed by an enormous elm; the white walls, dark thatch, and glowing roses of the little hostelry looking out invitingly beneath its shade. The building itself did not much exceed the other cottages in size, but had received the addition of a large room raised some ten or twelve feet above the ground, partly overhanging the river, under which oars and ropes lay scattered about; and just where land and water met, little pleasure-boats, ranged in order, danced on the tide, and seemed longing to escape from their moorings and float

away with it. The room and a flight of steps leading to it matched the inn walls in their dazzling whiteness; and to atone for their not sharing the roses also, both door and window-frames were painted green. To the left stood cottages singly and in pairs. Tall, ornamented chimneys and gables of dark red brick rose imposingly beyond, and somewhat behind, these smaller dwellings, telling that one of a more ambitious kind stood near, partially concealed by them.

The road to other villages wound between the palings of its lawn and those of the churchyard; and across the latter a pathway led into the grove.

Not a cottage lacked its monthly rose, or its gay little garden. Each tiny chamber lattice peeped from under thick brown thatch.

Here and there, scattered about the green and by the hedgerow, were groups of children, lying idly or at play. The heavy, time-worn ferry-boat rocked soberly at the water's edge, as if reproving by its grave tints and solemn movement the dancing gaiety of its bright little companions. The ferry-boat's commander, in sailor's garb, sat peeling osiers under the great elm.

Lying in its deep repose, the picturesque village seemed to our little town-bred maiden almost a holy place. The vague longing for something "better and beyond," which the beauties of nature often excite in a sensitive mind, filled hers, as half unconsciously to herself she followed the others into the ferry-boat. A sudden thought of Him, the Creator of this fair scene, flashed across her. A longing to



know something of this wondrous Being—her own Creator, too!—took strange possession of Ellie's heart, and chained her tongue, till she was abruptly roused from her reverie;—the boat had touched the opposite shore. And with Willie's hand in hers, she ran to the shadow of the great elm, there at her leisure to take a nearer view of the monthly roses.

The especial interest of the place lay in the grove, for here a legend rested. There stood one tree amongst the stately company all blasted and deformed. At its side the rustics said that long ago a terrible deed was done—not by man's agency, but by evil spirits'. And there the tree had stood, for a hundred years or more, a monument of the fearful penalty paid by perjured beauty! Ellie had heard the story often; and now, in silence and awe, she walked by her mother's side till the spot of ill-renew was reached.

The pathway through the grove rose abruptly from the churchyard-gate, so that soon a steep bank lay between it and the river beneath. Trees thickly clothed the descent to the water's edge; and in the most precipitous part stood the one against whose aged trunk the fatal catastrophe was said to have occurred. Ellie listened to the gurgling water as it played amongst the roots of the trees, and thought of the devoted maiden till it was a relief to get out into the broad sunshine again, and to hear her parents holding a discussion about tea and the inn.

When tea was over, the children were left under Sarah's care to play in the churchyard, while Mr. and Mrs. Woodford strolled in another direction.

Ellie soon bethought herself of the treasures in the hedgerow : Willie should have a wreath, and she would be the maker. So bounding away, she was soon contending with thorns and brambles, and pulling with all her might at the closely-twined stems of the wild convolvulus. Many a blossom was crushed in this eager attack ; but at last a beautiful spray was secured uninjured, which seemed the very thing she desired ; and hastening back to the churchyard, she made the little one sit down on the step of the church porch and wound the flowers amongst his curls. Then telling him to be sure and remain still till Mama came that she might see his wreath, she ran back to get some wild roses to take home to Emma Tiverton. She had just collected as many as her hands could carry when her mother appeared. Showing her treasures, Ellie entreated her to come and look at Willie, for whom she had made a birthday garland. A few steps brought them in sight of the spot where, obedient to the injunction given, Willie still sat in the porch. He was resting his cheek upon one little hand, and earnestly gazing up towards the sky. It was a touching attitude. Ellie pulled her mother's dress, saying, "Oh, stop, Mama ! Look before he sees us. Now isn't he the prettiest little thing in the whole world ? "

"Most lovely, most precious," was the mother's fervent reply ; and a minute after he was in her arms receiving showers of kisses, and pointing upwards to attract her attention to the birds flying high in the air, which had before been the objects of his own steadfast regard.

The return home was delayed till the moon was

up ; and when Ellie and her parents again reached the ferry-boat " the lady of the night " was brightly reflected in the beautiful river. Wonderingly little Willie gazed above, below ; and then, clasping his tiny hands, he said in a whispering voice, as if awed by the silence,—

" Two moons, two pitty moons, El-lie."

CHAPTER III.

JUNE fled, July came and went, and August opened upon the family in Brooke's Yard. It was a happy summer to the children, made up of simple pleasures, ever the best and truest. Of the grave cares which sometimes oppressed their parents the little ones knew nothing; and when Ellie saw a cloud upon her mother's brow she concluded that it was because "Papa was cross," and that it would be all over to-morrow.

"*Baby*" was the little spring of joy to which all the household turned for refreshment. So beautiful, that people would stop his attendant to notice and admire him. And his sweet sociability, when thus addressed, was winning for him many stranger friends.

As for Ellie, Willie was the one great delight of her life. She never wearied of playing with him. Every baby-expression he used was chronicled in her mind; and though impatient and irritable with all besides, towards Willie she was only the gentle, loving little sister.

It happened near the beginning of this month of

August that some fruit was to be fetched from a gardener who lived at a little distance from the town,—a pleasant evening walk for the children ; and they, with Sarah, were to go for it after an early tea. The weather had been oppressive for several days, and a thunder-storm had been more than once predicted ; but it seemed to have passed without paying Stockington a visit, and all was so bright on the evening in question, that the idea of giving up the walk did not even arise.

Sarah and the children had reached their destination, secured the basket of fruit, and the young ones were running about the fields gathering flowers on their way home, when a flash of lightning, instantly succeeded by a loud clap of thunder, startled them all. Sarah caught up Willie, and told Ellie to run as fast as she could, but a second or two showed her that it was useless to think of reaching home. Heavy drops were already falling ; they would be drenched unless they could find some speedy shelter. A cattle-shed, and that of the rudest description, was all that offered itself—just a covering, and nothing more. Hastening into its least exposed part, they barely contrived to protect themselves from the rain which now poured down in torrents as the storm burst over them.

Ellie was frightened, and Willie soon became restless, and (unusual for him) disposed to fret. Alarmed herself at the violence of the storm, and perplexed with Willie's unwonted irritability, Sarah had recourse to the basket, and gave him some fruit. Finding this had the desired effect of keeping him happy, she allowed him to have more ; and he con-

tinued eating at intervals till the rain had subsided and they could make their way homewards.

Mrs. Woodford was much relieved to see them walk in ; for knowing how exposed a part of their road was, she had feared they might have taken shelter under a tree, and thus have been in danger from the lightning.

The children were soon in bed, and Willie fell into his usual gentle slumber. He was more flushed than usual, his mother thought ; but the night was passed tranquilly, and in the morning the well-known sounds of joy and mirth greeted her ears from Willie's little bed beside her own.

An hour or two afterwards "Baby" stood playing at a chair in the sitting-room, Mrs. Woodford preparing breakfast, and Ellie giving her an animated description of the perils and alarm of yesterday's storm, when the room suddenly echoed a cry of pain, and the mother saw her darling fall backward to the floor !

She caught him up in her arms, and rang the bell violently. Mr. Woodford and Sarah ran together into the room, and heard her inquiring cry of terror,—

"What is it ? Oh ! what is it ?"

A glance told Mr. Woodford what was the matter. He replied in equal alarm and distress,—

"The child's in convulsions !" and hastily telling Sarah to prepare a warm bath, he ran off for the doctor.

"Mama, dear Mama !" said Ellie, "let me go and call Mrs. Tiverton. Perhaps she will know how to make Baby well."

"Yes, run. Tell her he is dying! Oh, make haste!" cried the agonized mother; and Ellie ran away to obtain the hoped-for succour.

Breathless she darted past the servant who admitted her into the parlour where all the Tiverton family were assembled at breakfast; and in words almost inarticulate from fright she told what had happened.

Mrs. Tiverton hurried from the room, saying to her daughters,—

"My dears, keep Ellie here and give her some breakfast. I'll send you word when Willie is better."

Eager inquiries followed her departure, but Ellie could tell but little.

"Well, don't look so frightened," said Mr. Tiverton, patting her pale cheek; "I've seen all those girls there struggle through bad illness, and they're none the worse for it this morning. There, now, sit down and make a good breakfast, and then you'll be ready to be useful, you know, if they want you."

But Ellie was in no state for eating. One minute she was full of hope that Mrs. Tiverton and the doctor would do something that would make Willie well directly. The next, those terrible words of her mother's, "Baby is dying!" would rush on her ear. Then again she would fancy Mrs. Tiverton coming in with a smiling face, and that she should run home, and see Mama smiling, too, with her darling on her lap just as of old, and then wonder how she could have been so frightened.

But hour after hour passed away, and there were no tidings. At noon Miss Tiverton went to inquire,

and came back in a few minutes, answering Ellie's eager looks of inquiry with a quiet

"He is very ill, Elspeth ; no better."

Later in the day inquiries were again made, but with no more encouraging result.

At last the evening closed in, and Ellie hoped she should be sent home. In this, however, she was disappointed ; for at her usual hour Emma was told to take her up to bed, and Ellie found that she was to be Emma's companion for the night. Long she lay awake, her heart filled with fear and sorrow. But sleep at last prevailed ; and when Ellie next became sensible of surrounding objects, Miss Tiverton was at her bedside, saying with a smile,—

"They are more hopeful about Baby, he is sleeping."

Joyfully Ellie dressed, forming, as she did so, a hundred plans for amusing Willie on his recovery, of which she now felt certain ; and thinking what a happy return hers would be to the home she had left so full of sorrow.

No lessons were required of Emma that day, and she was free to wander about the house and amuse Ellie, which she did so effectually that her guest was surprised when she heard the clock strike twelve.

"Let us go down, Emma," she said ; "I should think I may go now and see how Baby is myself. Let us ask if I may ;" and Ellie ran forward and reached the parlour first.

But what was her astonishment on pushing open the door, which stood ajar, to see Mrs. Tiverton sitting there alone leaning on the table, and shading

her face with her hand! A sudden terror seized Ellie. She went forward, and stood at Mrs. Tiverton's side, saying in a voice which revealed the distress she tried to hide,—

"You said, Ma'am, you would come and tell us when Willie was better."

Mrs. Tiverton started, evidently not thinking Ellie had been so near.

"Yes, my dear, I did. You're very anxious about him, Ellie, aren't you?"

"Yes, Ma'am, *very*."

"Mama is not anxious now. Baby's pain is over."

Ellie with difficulty got out the words, "I—I'm afraid, Ma'am, because you say that,—that p'r'aps Willie is—dead."

"Yes, indeed he is. I grieve to say it. He is. Ellie, your mother needs comfort. Remember, she has but one child left near her now. Should not that one strive to be a blessing to her?"

"Oh! yes—yes. I will never be naughty any more as long as I live. Do let me go to Mama."

"You shall. Emma will walk with you to the door."

Stunned by the heavy tidings, and scarcely remembering why she felt so frightened and so miserable, Ellie walked by Emma's side up the silent yard. At her father's door Emma left her in Sarah's care.

The maid's red and swollen eyes overflowed afresh at the sight of Ellie.

"Oh! Miss Ellie, he's gone—he's dead! Sweet little fellow! We shall never see him again—never!"

Still Ellie did not weep. She whose tears were usually so ready, was only cold and trembling now.

"Mama—where's Mama?" was all she said.

Sarah opened the sitting-room door; Ellie flew to her mother, and threw her arms round her. Neither spoke.

Mr. Woodford was away; and Ellie was glad to be alone with her mother. She had never seen, had scarcely heard of death, and knew not what to expect. Why was the house closed as if it were night? Was Willie quite gone away to heaven?

Presently she whispered, "Mama! do tell me if I shall see Baby again. Where is he?"

The mother struggled hard to speak.

"You will see his little body, Ellie, quiet and still. But the precious spirit which made it so lovely to us all is *gone*; it will never never return to us."

"Mama, may I see it now? Why doesn't he stay in this room? Don't let him be by himself!"

Silently her mother led Ellie into the other parlour; and there, where she had so often played with her baby brother, stood his little crib with a sheet spread over it. Trembling hands turned the coverlet gently back, and showed the angel-face almost as Ellie had seen it yesterday, before the fatal cry was heard. The sweet, soft pink on the cheek, and the golden curls waving over the perfectly pure brow—not changed at all; the snowy night-dress and little cap making it appear so natural that Ellie could hardly think they spoke truly when they said that Willie was gone. She went near to kiss his cheek, but started back.

“Oh! Mama, how cold! how very cold!” And now the bitter tears flowed fast.

Through long years the remembrance of those days was fresh in Ellie's mind. The visits with her mother to that silent room,—the darkened house,—the half-tasted meals;—in glad or sorrowful moments, that time—the time of her first grief—would often steal unbidden to her mind.

Ellie longed that Willie (the little marble form was “Willie” still to her) should sleep in the churchyard at Wilton, where the birds would sing to him all day, and where she fancied he would be “happier” than in the formal enclosure of the town. But the mother said Stockington must be her baby's resting-place; and so, beneath a little mound close to the church-door on which loving eyes would rest every Sabbath-day, the precious dust was laid to wait the Resurrection morning.

CHAPTER IV.

DAY after day went by wholly given up to grief. Grandmama, who had been sent for on the fatal close of little Willie's illness, would make Ellie walk out with her sometimes to show her the town and its immediate neighbourhood. But the poor mother could not be drawn from her retirement; till one morning her husband, startled at her increasing paleness and utter want of appetite, said, "Mary, I shall come home early to-day. We will have a boat, and all go on the river together."

"Ah, that's right, George, that's just what she wants," rejoined the elder lady. "No, my dear! don't make any objection! You'll be ill soon if you go on like this."

The pleading look which had been cast on her husband, and the entreating words her lips were forming, died away, and she only replied, "Perhaps it will be better."

"We will row up to Smith's Farm," he continued tenderly. "It's a nice place, where I've often had some tea when I've been angling, and there's a famous swing there for Ellie."

It was one of September's clearest, brightest days.

Ellie looked up at the deep blue sky, and thought of Willie, fancying, as for years she loved to do, that if that light cloud would only move aside, she should see the darling in his robe of dazzling white and golden crown. But prettier she thought he could not be than when here on earth. Would he know her, and stretch out his hands as of old, calling, "Ellie, Ellie"?

Filled with thoughts such as these, and with a more than childish longing to have him back, she walked on in silence, till they reached the river.

There was a soothing influence in that quiet gliding over its smooth surface, and insensibly the mourners proved its calming power.

They landed at the farmhouse, a gem of rural beauty, beside which a cluster of gigantic walnut-trees threw their shadow both on the dwelling and the stream. The house, thatched and irregularly built, was thickly covered with jasmine and honey-suckle ; while a small garden, now gay with autumn flowers, sloped gently from it to the river's edge. The swing dangled invitingly from the largest of the walnut-trees, under whose shade a gentleman, seated listlessly on the grass, appeared to be enjoying the beauty of the scene. He withdrew, after a short interval, and his place was taken by Mrs. Woodford and her mother ; Mr. Woodford going apart with his rod and line, and Ellie wandering about, charmed with everything she saw.

Tea was prepared for the visitors in the best parlour by Mrs. Smith, who, as she moved quietly about, cast looks of sympathy upon her guests

(though ignorant of the cause of their sorrow), not unobserved either by Ellie or her mother.

Some fields lay beyond the farm-buildings and yard at the back of the house—fields, just such as children love—an irregular surface of dell and hillock crowded in every sunny nook with wild flowers all the summer through, from the violet in early spring to the autumn crocus which, now dotted about in purple tufts, rose up in every direction.

“Mama, look!” said Ellie, as (intending to wander by the river’s bank) they passed a stile leading to these inviting fields. “Do let me go there, while you and Grandmama walk by the river. I should like to take Sarah some crocuses.”

“Well, if you will not go beyond the field where these sheep are feeding, you may.”

Ellie lightly climbed the stile, and ran off to gather the crocuses. She had already secured a store of these treasures, when the shepherd’s dog, who was taking a private survey of the environs of his charge from the other end of the field, caught sight of the small black object moving in the distance. On the alert in a moment, he commenced a furious barking, and bounded across the field. Ellie started at the sound, turned and saw him evidently making towards herself. She threw down her flowers, and, screaming with terror, began running in the direction of the stile she had lately passed. But her pace proved no match for that of the object of her fear, and, just as he seemed to be close behind her, she stumbled against a molehill, and fell to the ground.

"Don't be alarmed, little girl," said a kind voice a moment afterwards. "The dog seems quite harmless. I hope you are not much hurt."

And the speaker gently raised her, and looked earnestly in her face.

"I'm *frightened*," said Ellie (more than half angry as well). "Is that your dog?"

"No," said the stranger, smiling. "I suppose he is taking care of those sheep."

"Then I wish he would have stayed with the sheep, and not come running after me."

"We all neglect our duty sometimes, I'm afraid; and perhaps he thought you might be intending mischief to his charge. I'm glad I happened to be near, to put an end to your trouble. Are you really not hurt?"

"Thank you for lifting me up," said Ellie, now sufficiently recovered to remember good manners. "I'm only a little hurt. Will you send that great dog away? I can't go to the farm by myself while he's there;"—"and I've lost all my crocuses," she added, regretfully.

The dog was dismissed in a manner to which he yielded instant obedience, and the stranger said,—

"Now we will replace the crocuses. Are you fond of flowers?"

"Yes; but I like the fields, and trees, and rocks, and the river, better. Do you like beautiful prospects?"

"You shall judge. I had heard much of the scenery of this neighbourhood, and yesterday I

came more than thirty miles for the pleasure of spending one day in it. I have been to see the old Castle and Wilton this morning; indeed, I arrived at the farm only a short time before your party landed. You know Wilton, and Clinton-grove, I daresay?"

Ellie, interested at once, looked up quickly at the speaker, and might be pardoned if her gaze were prolonged and earnest.

The stranger, in age, seemed to stand just on the threshold of manhood. His figure was tall and erect, his face grave and pale. The large grey eyes softened almost to tenderness as they were bent on the little pale girl in her mourning garments. Ellie gazed thoughtfully into those kind, grave eyes. At length she replied,—

"Oh, yes! Isn't it lovely? Should you like to be buried in the churchyard there?"

Surprised, the stranger looked again upon Ellie's face, and saw in its expression an earnestness which showed him that the question was not put heedlessly.

"I had not thought of that," he said, "certainly. But it would indeed be a quiet and beautiful spot for the mortal part to rest in, if that were of any importance."

"Oh, it *is* of importance! I can't bear those dismal places in the town. The birds never sing there, and there are no beautiful trees."

"But what makes a little girl like you think most of being *buried* in connexion with that pretty church at Wilton?"

"I don't think this is a very *happy* world,"

said the child, after a pause, her eyes filling with tears.

Deeply touched to hear such a sentiment expressed by one so young, the stranger said, gently,

"I fear this" (touching her black frock) "has much to do with your thinking so sadly of life. Can you bear to tell me about it? Who is this mourning dress for?"

"For Willie, my own little brother," was the reply, followed by a burst of tears.

"Sit down here, and I will gather you some more crocuses," said the stranger, distressed at the effect of his inquiry; and, leaving Ellie to recover herself, he did not return till he had more than supplied the loss her fright had occasioned.

Finding her more composed, he took her hand, and asked if she would let him lead her back to the farm in safety. Receiving a grateful assent, he walked with her in the direction of the house, without making any further allusion to the subject which had distressed her. But Ellie, soothed by her new friend's manner, soon renewed the conversation, of her own accord, and poured forth all her tale of sorrow.

Then she described the dull house in the yard, and her disappointment about it, and how that Papa was too poor now to live in a pleasanter home; and then she added,—

"I am so naughty and troublesome, they say, that Papa is almost always angry with me. And he thinks I *like* to be naughty, and I'm sure I don't; only I'm so miserable sometimes."

Ellie's companion, struck with the simplicity and candour of her little story, as well as with the feeling it showed, longed to speak a soothing and helpful word to the child, and, after a few moments of thoughtful silence, said,

"And where do you think your baby-brother is now?"

"Oh, I *know* where he is. His body, his pretty little darling body, is lying near the porch of St. Peter's Church, at Stockington; and his soul is up—up in the blue sky, with God and all the beautiful angels. I often try so hard to see him —"

"Do you think Willie is good?"

"Yes. Everybody is good who goes to heaven."

"But what made him good?"

"Why, Willie was *never* naughty. He was a sweet little thing, always happy and always good."

"God did not think him so."

"What do you mean by that?" said Ellie, flushing with indignation.

"I mean that God has said, 'There is none righteous, no, not one.'"

"What! not such little babies as Willie?"

"No, not even babes. But surely you have been taught this long ago?"

"I know that old children, like I am, and some grown-up people, are often naughty and wicked; but I thought it wasn't really naughty for babies to get into a passion and scream, but that it was only because they did not know any better."

"But *you* know better, and yet you say you

are often naughty now, and you have gone on being so ever since you were a babe yourself, perhaps?"

"Yes. Papa says I was a most troublesome baby."

"I do not mean that all are equally irritable—'troublesome,' as you say; that depends on health, and many other circumstances. Little Willie was, I suppose, a happy-tempered child, and his sister fretful and passionate; but that made no difference in the sight of God. Both alike wanted what Willie has obtained."

"What is it?" inquired Ellie, eagerly..

" 'Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.' "

—*That* was the beauty which your little brother had, when God received him to His blessed home. He was taken, and was given that glorious robe, without knowing while here that it was needed. Those who are longer spared, and who have it really waiting for them above, so that they need not be afraid to die, have something here on earth, sent down from heaven day by day, which gives them a happy feeling in their hearts, and makes them dread all that is wrong, lest it should be driven away. Children who have that gift check their evil tempers by its power, and they are troubled with but few fears, except lest they should sin—because that precious gift from God always brings peace to old and young."

"Oh, what is it? Do you think *I* can ever have it; and that then those dreams will never

come, nor any of those dreadful feelings which make me so afraid to go to bed ? ”

“ I could not promise that such feelings would *never* come, for I suspect the owner of this little hand is naturally nervous, and at times she might be troubled still with undefined fear ; but when God’s Holy Spirit, that gift of which I speak, comes into the heart, He does such wondrous things there, that I feel sure even this would be lessened.”

“ I *wish* I could have it. I’m so unhappy sometimes, for I *can’t* be good ; and they all say—even Mama does—that I’m troublesome and disagreeable ; and—do you know ? I often wish to die.”

“ Indeed ! ” said the stranger. “ But what would happen then ? Dying removes us to the place for which we are already prepared ; and is, therefore, joy unspeakable, or sorrow without hope, according as our course on earth has been. Evil passions and violent tempers have no place among those happy ones whom Willie lives with now.”

“ Then I don’t know *what* I shall do, for, when I try to be good, I really believe I’m worse than I was before. It always happens so, and Mama is sure to say I’ve been more naughty that day than she has known me for a long time. And don’t you think that’s vexing, and enough to make me angry, after I’ve made plans about it, and have really determined to begin to be good ? ”

“ Perhaps if you were to try a new ‘ plan ’ altogether, it might succeed better ? ”

"What's that? Do you know quite a new one?"

"You repeat a prayer, morning and evening, I suppose?"

"Yes, of course."

"Do you ever ask God to give you a 'new heart, and a right spirit'?"

"No, that's not my prayer. I say, 'Our Father,' and, 'Pray God bless Papa and Mama,'—and all of them, you know,—'and make me a good girl.' That's what Mama tells me to say."

"Well, 'make me a good girl,' means what those words of God more fully express. It is really asking that all wrong may be set right, and that 'old things' may 'pass away.' Try to remember this, that when you say, 'make me a good girl,' you are asking God to begin that new creation within you, without which all your own trying and 'plan'-making will be of no use at all."

They had passed the farm, and were strolling slowly by the river, before the last words were spoken. Ellie did not answer; but a glance at her face convinced the stranger that his advice was not unheeded; and he resolved not to weaken its effect by disturbing the little girl's reflections. They had, therefore, wandered on some distance, before the silence was broken by the inquiry,

"Did not that gentleman who is fishing up the stream come in the boat with you?"

"Yes. That's Papa. He always goes on that side the river, if he can. He says the

fish——. Oh, there they are ! That's Mama nearest the river. How far they have walked ! Mama must feel better, I'm sure. Will you come and speak to her, that she may thank you for taking care of me ? ”

“ I have seen you within reach of protection, and I believe that is all I can do, for I have some distance to go to-night, and the evenings begin to close in early. Good-bye. I shall often think of our pleasant walk.”

“ Good-bye,” said Ellie, warmly. “ I'm sure I shall remember you. You have been so *very* kind to me. And I should like to remember the other, too. I hope I shall ; I will try.”

Ellie watched the retreating figure with a keenness of regret, kindred, in its strength, with all her other feelings ; and when it could be seen no longer, she hurried towards her mother to tell of her adventure, and give a glowing description of the stranger's appearance and manner.

“ Well,” said Grandmama, when she paused for a moment, “ if he had such beautiful eyes, I suppose they were like your father's, for they are the most beautiful *I* ever saw, or you either, I believe.”

Ellie flushed crimson, as in displeasure she was wont, and began vehemently,—

“ He wasn't a bit like Papa in anything.”

A light touch on her arm from her mother, and a half-smothered reproof from the elderly lady, stopped her, and she was returning to her previous style of description.

“ Never mind now, Ellie,” said her mother,

finding that they were on dangerous ground. "Run forward, and ask at the farm that the boat may be in readiness by the time we all reach the mooring-place. There is Papa putting away his fishing-tackle ; and that is our signal for moving homewards."

CHAPTER V.

THE early autumn twilight had wellnigh faded into darkness when Ellie reached her home.

Linked with Willie, and the world where he was gone, were all the new strange things which had been opened to her mind that afternoon; and her thoughts passed naturally from the little empty crib, on which her eye rested as she prepared for bed, to the verse which spoke of the "glorious dress" the darling who once had nestled there was wearing now.

Long after the child's head rested on her pillow, her spirit was searching into things unseen.

Engrossed with thoughts of Willie and his "glorious dress," Ellie had forgotten that a new petition was to have been interwoven with her evening prayer. She recalled now the stranger's explanation of the words she was in the habit of using, and those he had given her to replace them; and, vexed at having so soon forgotten her new friend's injunction, she crept out of bed, and, kneeling in the moonlight, with punctilious care repeated the words he had suggested.

With morning came the desire to test the efficacy of the "new plan ;" and, after dressing hastily, Ellie ran downstairs and out into the yard, there to await the descent of the elders. Having, as she thought, observed what had been enjoined, she looked for an immediate result, and expected to find herself proof against any temptations which might fall in her way. Her mother soon came from her bedroom, and Ellie ran to meet her. Mrs. Woodford saw she was full of some new idea, and was about to inquire the meaning of what she noticed, when Grandmama appeared with a portentous face, and upon her daughter asking if anything was the matter, she said angrily, "There's nothing the matter with *me* ; but I do think it's a shame, Mary, that that child should leave her bedroom in the state she does. I heard Sarah telling her about it the other day, and so I just went in this morning as I passed, to see how things were. If she belonged to *me*, I'd have all different there, or I'd know the reason why."

"Oh, Ellie! I'm sorry," said her mother.

" 'Sorry,' Mary! That won't teach her better. Why don't you make her go up and tidy her things before you give her her breakfast? That's what she'd get of *me*, and dry bread afterwards into the bargain."

"Go, Ellie," said her mother, "and make haste before Papa comes down."

Ellie hesitated, and looked fiercely towards her Grandmama.

"Ah! it's no use looking like that at me," said the old lady, laughing, and seating herself at the breakfast-table. "*That* won't put the room straight."

Ellie's eyes flashed ; and, saying in audible tones, as she bounced out of the room, "It's no business of hers," she received an order from her mother to remain upstairs, and not to appear at breakfast at all that day.

One of Ellie's old fits of passion followed, and she found herself storming away in her bedroom much as she had done at intervals as long as she could remember. While the tempest lasted, even the new friend shared her indignation. Why did he tell her that it would make her better to say those words? It was all through him that she had forgotten to put her room neat. Then, as Ellie became calmer, the stranger was restored to favour. *He* could not be wrong. It was Grandmama's fault. She was always so disagreeable ; and, till she was gone, it was useless to attempt reformation. Her conscience thus quieted, Ellie looked forward with impatience to Mrs. Woodford's departure, feeling sure she should prove the efficacy of her petition when this trial of temper was removed.

The day so much desired came at last, and Ellie began her work of reform.

But a short time sufficed to prove the fallacy of her expectations ; for she fell, not once nor twice, but constantly—"worse than ever," she said. Aye, true ; we marvel not. The enemy with whom Ellie was doing battle now could not be thus subdued. She asked, indeed, for power against the foe ; but while her lips moved with the petition, her thoughts were with her own weapons, and how they should be wielded ; and she must be taught by many a fruitless conflict yet that it is "not by might, nor by power,

but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts," that the victory is won.

November's brief and dreary days had stolen upon the land, and there was not one of the household in Brooke's Yard who did not think with heart-sinking of the long months of winter at hand.

A drizzling rain had been falling all one morning through a heavy, clinging mist. Full daylight could hardly be said to have visited the yard at all that day, and now, at an early dinner, candles seemed almost needed. Little was said during the meal, and, while it was being removed, Mr. Woodford walked up and down the room, standing still every time he came to the window, to look up at what could be seen of the sky.

"This is dismal weather for you, my dear," he said, at length. "Can't you run across and sit an hour or two with Mrs. Tiverton this afternoon?"

"No, thank you. Ellie and I will employ ourselves. I should not be better at Mrs. Tiverton's. We must expect dismal weather in November. A letter!" she added, brightening, as Sarah entered the room, holding one in her hand. "I wonder where from?"

"A shilling to pay, if you please, Ma'am."

"Then from London, no doubt. But the writing is not familiar to me; whose can it be?"

"If you break that great red coat-of-arms," said her husband, "you'll perhaps find out."

"I've seen those arms, but I can't recollect where," said Mrs. Woodford, musingly, as she broke the seal. "Oh! from Ann Forrester. To think I should have forgotten *her* writing! But it is long since I saw it.

Would you like to hear the contents?" she continued, after hastily running her eye over the letter, her colour having heightened as she proceeded.

"Well, to judge by your face, it must be something pleasant, so let's have it."

Mrs. Woodford read as follows:—

"Ferndale Grange, Downshire,

"November, 18—.

"MY DEAR MARY,—

"We have not forgotten each other, I believe, though it is so long since we held any intercourse. You have, I fear, been encompassed by care, for this, report through various channels, has told me.

"But do you love to dwell on old times, Mary? You must brush up your memory now, if such be the case, for I shall soon make demands on it. We are coming to be your near neighbours. Dr. Forrester has made an arrangement with a medical man in your town (who is wishing to resign his practice) to join him for twelve months; and if the place suits us, and David is satisfied with the style of practice, we shall remain. All the circumstances which have led to this plan I must leave to recount when we meet, and must tell you now a little about our domestic circle.

"My firstborn, Percy, has just passed his eighteenth birthday. He is being educated for the law, and is settled in London for that purpose. We have just consented to his engagement with a young lass, whom we think worthy even of him; of which

“ important arrangement circumstantial account
 “ shall be given you some day when we are sitting
 “ side by side at Stockington.

“ Next to Percy comes David ; then Maud, my
 “ only girl ; and, lastly, our youngest, Harry.
 “ These three we bring with us. As it is needful
 “ we should be settled by the 1st of December, we
 “ decide on taking a furnished house for the proba-
 “ tionary twelve months, if such can be procured in
 “ a good part of the town. And for this I want to
 “ ask you to look out for us. A good-sized house,
 “ and an airy situation, is all I need say. You know,
 “ better than I could describe, all other requisites ;
 “ and I shall therefore venture to leave it in your
 “ hands. So much for my concerns and dear ones ;
 “ now, how are yours ?

“ Do not be over-sorrowful about the past, my
 “ dear Mary. Brighter days will come, and your
 “ children will be a blessing to you. I hear Jessie
 “ has adopted your eldest, and that she is a pro-
 “ mising child. Little Elspeth, too, is stronger than
 “ she used to be ; and the boy a prodigy of beauty.
 “ I picked up this news about your young ones from
 “ Clara Merton, just after you had gone to Stocking-
 “ ton, and have heard nothing since.

“ We have been staying here with Mr. and Mrs.
 “ Ambrose Forrester for several months past—ever
 “ since our return to England, in an undecided state
 “ as to what we should do next ; and I am not a
 “ little glad at last to have a definite plan before us,
 “ especially as that plan involves reunion with an
 “ old and dear friend like yourself. How pleasant
 “ for our children to be in habits of constant inter-

"course, as we ourselves were in years gone by!

"Elspeth and Maud must be sisters together.

"The Doctor joins me in kind regards to Mr.

"Woodford, and, with warmest love to yourself,

"Believe me,

"Your affectionate friend,

"ANN FORRESTER.

"P.S. Being ignorant of your address, I have
"directed to the care of Messrs. Tiverton, which I
"hope will insure the safe reception of my letter."

"How did *she* know I was at Tiverton's, then?"
inquired Mr. Woodford, in dissatisfied tones.

"From Clara Merton, I suppose."

"Humph! women must talk. Well, never mind,"
he added, as he saw the shade returning to his wife's
face, which had been lighted up, by pleasant antici-
pation, with something of its old brightness. "I'm
glad of this for you. You can't go out this wretched
day; but to-morrow I think I can tell you where to
find exactly the house that will suit these friends of
yours."

"Can you? Where is it?"

"Why, that house of ——'s in Castle-place.
They're gone to London for a year at least, and
perhaps for a continuance, I'm told. And that's a
capital house, and just a right situation for the
Doctor."

"Exactly. Well, I'll go to-morrow morning,
and Ellie shall have a holiday, and go with me. She
must, of course, have a hand in fixing on the home
for a new 'sister.' "

Ellie's heart beat quickly at that happy thought;

and when she failed to obtain any satisfactory information about Maud from her mother (who had never seen any of the young members of the Forrester family but Percy the eldest, and not even him since his childhood), she allowed her imagination full scope, and pictured Maud as the most loving and devoted of friends, never happy away from her new 'sister.'

The house was inspected the next day, and pronounced suitable. It seemed, indeed, just to have fallen vacant on purpose for the Forresters. That was Ellie's view of the case; and her mother admitted that its being to let at this time was a fortunate coincidence. Terms and other particulars were reported to the Doctor and his lady, and, to Ellie's joy, received their approval. By the end of the following week all was in readiness.

Breakfast was no sooner over on the long-anticipated day of the Forresters' arrival than Mrs. Woodford and Ellie set off for Castle-place, to see that fires and comforting cheer were in readiness for the travellers. With a beating heart, as noon drew on, Ellie stationed herself at the drawing-room window, flattening her nose against the glass, and straining her eyes to see as far as possible. But her patience was taxed, for it was more than half-an-hour before the travellers, escorted by Mr. Woodford, came in sight.

"There they are, Mama! there they are!—Maud, and David, and Harry, and all of them!" she exclaimed at last; and, without another word, Ellie ran downstairs, followed by her mother.

Mrs. Woodford and her friend embraced warmly.

Mrs. Forrester then turned to the children, who stood looking shyly at each other, and, kissing Ellie, she said, "This is Elspeth, I suppose. But where did those little white cheeks come from? They don't belong either to Papa or Mama. Here, Maud. This is *your* friend, you know. Come and say something to her."

This command effectually prevented any further greeting than an awkward "How do you do?" The children shook hands, and again stood staring at each other, on observing which, Mrs. Forrester laughingly said to her friend, "Children seem even more at a loss than their elders at a new meeting. But we shall not have to complain of silence by-and-bye when they are together, I dare say. Harry, boy! see what sort of a greeting *you* can give Elspeth."

Upon which Harry rushed up to Ellie, threw his arms round her neck, gave her a squeeze and a sounding salute, and then ran to the window, blushing to the roots of his hair.

"Bravo, my man!" said his mother. "Now it's David's turn."

This was but a repetition of Maud's salutation, and the Doctor, patting Ellie's head, said kindly, "Elspeth is thinking us queer folks, I can see; but we shall understand each other better soon."

The party dispersed, to get rid of their travelling dresses; and, when they all reappeared in the dining-room, and were seated round the table for lunch, there was opportunity for Ellie to observe each separately, and she found that neither was what she had expected.

Maud was a sickly-looking child, with no beauty, but a pair of large, intelligent eyes, and an ample forehead. David was much like her, only having brown instead of grey eyes ; and, while she appeared to be delicate, he looked in robust health. Ellie told her mother afterwards that he had stared at her all lunch-time, she believed, without once winking his great eyes, and she didn't think she should like *him*. Harry came in for the largest share of her approval. He, too, had "great eyes ;" but, instead of sharing the gravity and thought of those owned by his brother and sister, they were the merriest pair imaginable, having also a kind and loving expression, which quickly won back love to their possessor.

Ellie and Harry were friends at once ; and when she returned home, and had leisure to compare anticipations with realities, she found, to her surprise, that the *heroine* of all her day-dreams had been transformed into a laughing, merry boy, considerably younger than herself.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. FORRESTER was the eldest of a large family, amongst whom Mary Lister had always been a welcome guest.

Many years younger than Ann Pennington, Mary had been more especially the companion of the juvenile members of the circle, while they were all together. But, upon the marriage of the eldest sister, the young girl had paid repeated and prolonged visits to her wedded home, and there, indeed, had first seen Mr. Woodford, at a time when a member of his family occupied a position of much interest in that of the Penningtons.

Soon after this introduction, and before its result was thought of, Dr. Forrester's precarious health had induced him to accept a medical appointment in a climate less variable than that of England, and from that time to the present the friends had never met.

Dr. Forrester and Mr. Woodford were too dissimilar to feel real pleasure in each other's society. The former was a man of cultivated mind and refined taste; the latter was only in his element amongst men devoted to business, or with a brother

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angler. The world's busy tongue had not failed to repeat the story of the past concerning Mr. Woodford's course of life, nor to tell, with its own interpretations, how it came to pass that, having left him in affluence on parting, Dr. Forrester met him now in poverty. Much, however, as there appeared to be cause for blame, Dr. Forrester knew how to commiserate too, and strove that, as far as he could prevent it, no humiliating contrast should force itself on Mr. Woodford's mind between the time of their acquaintance in his prosperous days, and the time of their meeting now under circumstances so changed.

Mr. Woodford's proud nature shrank from the society of all who knew his past history. Yet, for his wife's sake, he restrained the outward manifestation of this feeling towards the Forresters ; with none but herself was it suspected. And when he pleaded business-engagements as an apology for rare visits to Castle-place, the excuse was believed in, and accepted. Mrs. Woodford wisely appeared unconscious, too, trusting that time and kindly intercourse might bring about a better feeling on her husband's part. So welcome to her was the close intimacy which soon became established between herself and her old friends, that all who loved her could not but rejoice in the change which a few weeks, under the influence of this new interest, wrought in the previously sad face and spiritless step.

The course which things eventually took amongst the children of the two families, might easily have been foretold on the day of the Forresters' arrival.

After a few meetings, Maud and David decided together in private that Ellie was "a silly little thing, who knew nothing at all," and, therefore, unsuited as a companion for *them*. Neither Dr. nor Mrs. Forrester was slow to read what was passing in the minds of the elder children about Ellie, or to mark Harry's joy when she appeared. Setting aside, therefore, the original idea of Maud and Ellie as sisters, measures according with the now-discovered inclinations of all the young ones were quietly taken in the arrangement of the house in Castle-place. A bedroom was changed into a study for Maud and David; and there, they were told, they would be free to follow their own tastes.

Maud's early love of books had kindled the latent inclination in her brother, and for children of those days they were both prodigies of learning.

A large room at the top of the house, henceforth to be called, for lack of a better name, "the nursery," was allotted to Harry and his friend; and here they were to be the reigning powers, as much as Maud and David in their retirement below; the only restriction being that Ruth (Harry's nurse) was to have a place by the fireside, or the most cheerful window, for her chair and work-table.

"Harry, you see Maud isn't going to be my sister, as your Mama said she would before you came to Stockington," said Ellie one afternoon, when she and Harry were seated together on the floor before the nursery fire.

"But don't you like to be with me, Ellie? Don't you like this nice large room?"

"Oh, yes; very much!—a great deal better

than the study. And I like you better than Maud, too; only your Mama said Maud was to be my sister, and so it's all different from what I expected."

Harry got up on his knees, and, putting his arm round Ellie's neck, said, looking earnestly in her face,—

"Let me be your brother, Ellie,—your own little brother."

"My little brother is up in heaven, Harry," said Ellie, her eyes filling with tears.

At this Harry looked frightened, and, begging her not to cry, besought and obtained permission to be her "own little brother," from that day forward.

A new existence seemed to open upon Ellie with the arrival of the Forresters. Not less than on her mother, the effect of an entirely fresh interest became perceptible upon her, in renewed spirits, and the cheerful expression of her little pale face. But so bright a state of things could not, with a temperament like Ellie's, remain long without interruption.

As the first excitement produced by the arrival of the Forresters began to wear off, she became alive to some *mystery* in her home. Something was being done, or about to be done, which was concealed from her; and to make a discovery of what that "something" might be, became her determination.

Nothing came of it, however. All her prying and questioning failed of making either her mother or Sarah a whit more communicative; and Mrs. Forrester was too dignified for Ellie to venture on

an application to her. So, after having got herself into a series of scrapes in her endeavour to search out the supposed mystery, she at last gave up her investigations, finding them decidedly more troublesome than effectual.

Time did not hang heavily with Ellie now. The old vague fears, it is true, would haunt her sometimes ; then the stranger and his remedy came to mind. But, for the most part, the Forrester family in general, and Harry in particular, filled her thoughts, and were antidotes for all trouble.

Her friendship with Harry was one which exactly suited Ellie. She was the elder, and the authority in all things ; and, as he was always ready to yield submission to her will, and never unhappy but when he happened unconsciously to have offended her, things went on as smoothly in the "nursery" as in the "study."

Winter passed by. The days began to lengthen.

One morning—the last in February—when Ellie awoke, she was surprised to find broad daylight and sunshine filling her room. What could this mean ? Why had she been allowed to sleep so late ?

She was meditating on the probable cause of this unusual occurrence, when Sarah gently entered the room, and, seeing Ellie sitting up in bed, said,—

"Oh, you're awake, my dear ! Well, then, you may get up ; but be as quiet as you can."

For one moment Ellie looked at Sarah only in astonishment ; the next, suspicion and anger took the place of surprise. Something was being done

which was to be concealed from her ! To this she resolved she would not patiently submit.

"Why didn't you call me before, Sarah ?" she said, petulantly.

"Why, Miss Ellie, you like to lie in bed in the morning, don't you ?"

"*That's* not the reason. You know, Sarah, that it isn't.—I thought *grown-up people* were *too good* to tell untruths," she added with emphasis.

"No, my dear, that was *not* the reason to-day ; but now, if you dress quickly, and go to Mama's room, perhaps you will find there something that will please you."

So saying, with a meaning smile on her face, Sarah went away.

Ellie did not need another bidding to dress quickly ; but, hurrying over the business with all possible speed, she ran across the passage, opened the door of her mother's room ; and then indeed an unexpected scene presented itself !

There lay Mama in bed—a happy smile upon her face ; and on a low seat beside the fire sat Mrs. Forrester, with a Babe upon her lap !

"Come, Ellie," said the lady, "and see your new brother ! What will Harry say to this ?"

But Ellie crept first to her mother's side, and, kissing her cheek, inquired, in a half-whispering voice,—

"Is that your very own baby, Mama ?"

"Why, dear me, yes, little Miss ! Whose *should* it be ?" replied an old woman, who now appeared from behind the bed-curtains, and added to the

dream-like effect of the whole scene. "Dr. Forrester brought it to us this morning."

"That was *very* kind of Dr. Forrester," said Ellie, with a grateful look towards his lady.

"A little treasure sent to comfort us for all our sorrow," said Mrs. Woodford, with smiling lips, and eyes full of tears. "Go and look at him, Ellie, and tell me who you think he is like."

Kneeling before the stranger, Ellie took the little hand in hers, and kissed the tender cheek.

"He's dreadfully red!" she said mentally. "I wonder whether he will always be like that? He has dark eyes; that's like Mama. But how they do stare! And such an ugly little nose!"

Ellie was so intent on the baby's want of beauty, that, instead of replying to her mother's inquiry, as to whom she thought him like, she kept silently stroking the tiny hand, and heartily wishing her new brother had been a few degrees more attractive.

Mrs. Forrester now told her it was settled that she should go and spend a fortnight in Castle-place, and that she and Harry should come for a few minutes every day, just to see Baby. These were joyful tidings. "To see baby," too! Delightful words those were!—(or *might* have been, rather; for Ellie had many misgivings as to what Harry might think of baby.) And, resolving to have a private conversation with Sarah about her new brother's appearance, before she encountered Harry, Ellie made good her retreat from her mother's room, and went straight to the kitchen.

She opened the subject by first kissing Sarah, and saying she was sorry for having been cross.

"Yes, my dear, I'm sure you are now; but you must learn to *trust* people more, and not always think they wish to tease and vex you. Well, what do you say to that precious little thing upstairs?"

"I'm very glad. And wasn't it kind of Dr. Forrester? Only if he had been so good as to bring a *white* child—and if baby hadn't had that frightful hair, that doesn't curl a bit—I should have liked him better."

At this Sarah laughed heartily, saying, "Oh, wait a while, Miss Ellie! He is a white child! By-and-bye the redness will be gone, and the little black hair will fall off, and pretty curls will come in its place."

"Will they really? Are you quite *sure* of that? And will he be as pretty as Willie?"

"I don't know about that, my dear. Very few are as pretty as he was—and perhaps he'd better not be."

"I'm so glad, Sarah, you think he's not going to be that frightful little thing always. When Harry comes, I shall tell him it will all pass off; and so he needn't say anything about my new brother being ugly."

This was said with a mental resolve to put down in a decided way any observations of a doubtful kind, on Harry's part, touching the baby's personal appearance; in anticipation of which, Ellie felt half disposed to be angry with Harry; and she was *more* than half cross with Dr. Forrester for not having managed better.

"I wonder whether, *as long as I live in this*

world” (she said to herself, vehemently), “there will ever be anything *quite* right. It is so strange that there should always be something to spoil one’s pleasure. Now, if this little thing had only been pretty, like Willie, there would have been something really nice to tell Harry.”

At this moment, a knock at the door told of Harry’s arrival, and she ran to meet him.

“Oh, Ellie, you are to come and stay with us for two whole weeks ! And Papa says you have a dear little brother, with such beautiful eyes ! But I’m your biggest brother, Ellie, ain’t I ? You’ll play with me all the same, won’t you ?”

“Yes, Harry. Baby can’t play ; he does not even know who I am. Does your Papa think his eyes *are* pretty ? I’m sure that’s a good thing !—Harry, don’t mind,” she added, apologetically—her intended sternness melting away before Harry’s pleasant greeting—“about his being a little red, ugly thing now ; because he’ll be quite different soon. Sarah says he will ; and she knows all about babies.”

But Harry would have cared little had the small stranger been ten times more ugly ; so that Ellie would let *him* keep his place of “biggest brother,” and not leave him, to play with the new comer.

He was comforted at hearing that Baby did not even know who Ellie was ; and hoped things might continue in that state for an indefinite time.

CHAPTER VII.

THE new happiness in Ellie's home became clouded as spring advanced by an evident failure in Mrs. Woodford's health.

Dr. Forrester spoke of change—an airy lodging out of town as quickly as possible, and a removal altogether from Brooke's-yard before winter.

Alarmed on his wife's account, and trembling lest the late-born treasure should suffer also from the confined situation of his home, Mr. Woodford required no urging to make him prompt in his measures now. An anxious interview with Dr. Forrester was no sooner closed than he presented himself (to that lady's no small surprise) in Mrs. Tiverton's parlour. With a confiding manner, as unprecedented as his call, he told her the doctor's opinion, and asked her advice about a lodging.

She entered with warm interest into the subject ; and the same evening, as the Woodfords were sitting round their tea-table, Mrs. Tiverton was announced.

She said that her search for a lodging had been successful, if Mrs. Woodford could, for the present emergency, put up with a sitting-room and one

bedroom only. The daughter of the person to whom the house she had seen belonged would serve as attendant both for herself and the baby. The situation of the cottage was healthful, and, though near the town, was entirely removed from houses.

Mrs. Tiverton's judgment was too well appreciated both by husband and wife to admit of hesitation. They decided at once on Mrs. Woodford's removal to Mill Cottage, with as little delay as possible, for a fortnight's change. It was further settled that Ellie and her father should in turn spend a week of the fortnight with Mrs. Woodford there ; Sarah, meanwhile, keeping house in the yard, and paying daily visits to the Cottage.

May was a sweet, smiling month this year. Easterly winds and chilling showers had not intruded their unwelcome visits since it opened. Fearlessly and unchecked, leaves and buds expanded beneath bright beams and gentle rain-drops, and the landscape looked charmingly fresh and green.

Ellie and her "brother" had already possessed themselves of many a basket of wild flowers, and had become expert in finding where violets and wood-anemones were to be sought for. Could Ellie's heart have been at ease about her mother, this would have been a cloudless spring.

Many children would have seen the pale cheek and languid step from day to day, and never have drawn sorrow from the sight. It was not so with Ellie. Quick to detect the rising cloud, her young heart ached and trembled when she marked these signs of coming trouble. And her first joyful

thought, when she heard of Mill Cottage, and the plans connected with it, was on her mother's account.

That all might participate in the pleasure of the first introduction to the country lodging, Mrs. Woodford proposed, when the morning arrived for her going there, that all the children should precede herself and Mrs. Forrester, going immediately after dinner, that they might have a long afternoon for exploring the cottage and its precincts ; she and Mrs. Forrester following in time for an early tea. So agreeable a suggestion met with a hearty reception ; and soon after three o'clock they were all in marching order.

A short walk took them to one of the high roads which led to another town, and, as they began to ascend a hill, Sarah, who had been sent previously on a pioneering expedition to Mill Cottage, called out to the children, "There it is, my dears !" And all eyes were at once directed to the only dwelling of any importance which could there be seen.

The house stood on a rocky bank which rose high above the level of the road, parallel with it, and approached from the side nearest Stockington by a way for pedestrians only, steps being rudely cut here and there to break the steepness of the acclivity. Accommodation for carts going to the mill was afforded in another direction. A broad pavement ran the whole length of the house ; then came a little space of rough broken ground ; after which the bank descended precipitously to the road beneath.

The cottage itself was long and low. The situation was breezy and healthful ; and the casement windows, the whiteness of the stuccoed walls, and the bright green of the newly-painted door, had a fresh, holiday appearance, which impressed our young townsfolk favourably at once.

In a field which stretched behind the house, and also skirted the road for some distance, stood the mill, which gave its name to the cottage, and was the most picturesque object about the place.

The knock at the cottage door was answered by Mrs. Simpson and her daughter together. The visitors were led through the common sitting-room of the family, into which the door opened, to the guest-chamber, the room appointed for Mrs. Woodford's use. This was large and light. One window looked towards the road ; another, of smaller size, and higher from the ground, faced the garden behind the cottage, and possessed an attraction which instantly caught the children's attention. The rock, which rose considerably at the back of the house, had been cut away to admit the light, leaving outside the window a little square area—a tempting place for children ; and small niches, cut at intervals in one end of the little cave, seemed expressly designed to assist young feet in their ascent from its depths. The window-sill came at the best point for forming a commodious seat, and there was altogether so much of general capability about it that Ellie's imagination ran riot at once, and her eager suggestions to Harry turned Mrs. Simpson's attention from the baby to what they were saying.

"Ah! my dears," she began ; "*you* like that bit

of a place, do you? My children spent half their time there—seemed to me never tired of it! And see what comical figures they've made on the rock! Their poor father cut them places too, for 'em to get up and down by. Maybe you might like to go into it presently?"

Ellie and Harry had no hesitation on that point. The invitation was accepted joyfully; and, together with the garden, this spot engrossed their attention till summoned in to tea.

When the meal was over, and the servants were dismissed to improve their acquaintance with the Simpson family over "the cup that cheers but not inebriates," the two elder ladies stationed themselves at the large window, baby lying on his mother's lap. Maud and David went off to explore the fields beyond that in which the mill stood, and the two little ones were deciding to what part their attention should be directed, when it suddenly darted into Ellie's mind that *she* could take care of baby while the servants were at tea. She was a skilful little nurse, and had often been allowed to carry her infant brother up and down the room, and even in the yard, while her mother sat watching her. Harry was frequently the companion of these walks, and acted as train-bearer to the baby. Ellie was proud of the trust, and anxious now to let Mrs. Forrester see it confided to her. So, running up to the bedroom, she fetched from it some light wraps for the babe, and reappeared with such earnest petitioning to be allowed to carry him, that her request was soon granted.

"Only, Ellie, you must be careful. I expect Papa

every minute now, and if he saw you holding baby carelessly, you know how much displeased he would be."

Ellie promised ; and her mother carried the infant to the door, and laid him in her arms, adjusting the robe over Harry's.

A pavement, as we have said, fronted the whole length of the cottage. At one end was an entrance to the mill field ; at the other, on abruptly rising ground, stood a rick-yard. The pathway leading to the latter was merely a footing-place for labourers, cut on the side of the ascent, which sloped sharply from it above and below. At the foot of this steep decline the ground was somewhat hollowed out, and formed a little basin, which was covered with coarse grass and nettles.

Once or twice the children passed the window, Ellie each time receiving an injunction to be careful, and to come in directly she began to feel tired. "Careful" at first, she soon waxed bolder, and proceeded at the next turn to mount the narrow pathway leading to the rick-yard. Harry remonstrated ; but Ellie was sure she could walk there just as well as on the flat surface, and on she went. The summit was almost reached, when something caused her to start and step aside. The path was too narrow to admit of such a movement, and she lost her footing. A quick, involuntary motion of her arms in the endeavour to regain it loosed the precious burden from her hold. The infant fell from her clasp, and rolled down the steep bank.

Uttering a piercing scream, Ellie half stumbled, half ran, to the bottom of the hollow ; and then,

not knowing what she did, rushed towards the house. The sounds of distress had reached the ears of every one there, and all ran in the direction from which they proceeded, meeting the two children, whom fright seemed to have deprived of the power of speech.

"Where is he?"—"What has become of the baby?" was uttered by each in varied tones of alarm. Mrs. Woodford stopped for a moment, and, deadly pale, laid her hand on her little girl's arm. "Ellie! tell me where he is." All were silent to hear her reply, and, in the lull, the infant's smothered screams became audible. The mother rushed on, and found him lying in the place already described. With trembling arms she took him up; and, saying to Sarah, "Go for your master and Dr. Forrester as quickly as possible," she hurried to the house.

At that moment Mr. Woodford was seen running up the hill. He had been on the point of ascending the rough pathway, when he heard screams; and, seeing the people coming out of the house in haste, had felt sure something was wrong.

When he became aware of what had occurred, and learned that Ellie was the cause, he was almost frantic; and, rushing into the house, without a word of inquiry more, he glared on his little girl a look of fury, and struck her a violent blow. Ellie was standing with clasped hands, lips parted—no tear, or shade of colour on her cheek—with strained eyes fixed on her little brother. As they turned upon her father, all expression but that of fear forsook them. He seemed as if he did not dare to look towards his

babe ; and, stamping his foot on the ground, he said, in tones half agony, half rage, "Go away! Go, I say! I never want to see you again!"

Ellie stared at him as if she could not summon sufficient intellect to understand his meaning. "Go!" uttered again in wild tones of passion, had the effect of making her know she was to leave the room ; and, hurrying to the bedroom alone, she leant trembling upon the bed.

There was now an interval of anxious suspense to all. But at length the doctor came ; and, after a careful scrutiny, he was able to comfort the parents by saying that at present he did not discover anything beyond bruises, and a strain to the wrist, upon which the child had no doubt fallen. But he desired to speak with caution, lest any internal injury, which he could not as yet detect, might have been sustained. Then followed directions for the relief of present pain, as far as it was understood, and Joe Simpson was despatched to the surgery.

Mrs. Forrester decided on remaining with her friend through the night, and suggested that the children and servants should return home immediately. Mr. Woodford would stay, of course, and, with Kate Simpson's help, they would have all that could be needed.

Dr. Forrester's report had considerably calmed Mr. Woodford, though it was hard to parents' ears to hear the continued screaming, and to see the little disfigured face and swollen wrist. And each new burst of distress from the infant seemed to increase the father's indignation against Ellie.

"Where is she?" he exclaimed, as he saw the

others preparing to return home. Some one suggested that Ellie had gone upstairs, and the terrified child soon heard her father's step at the door of the room where she had taken refuge.

"So you have not *quite* succeeded in killing your little brother!" he said, as he pushed it open, and stood before her.

"Oh! Papa, Papa! don't say that! I did not mean to hurt him. It was naughty to go there—but there was a dreadful man! and I was frightened, and my foot slipped."

"I think it *was* naughty. I can only tell you that if I ever know of your taking him in your arms again I'll —. Frightened, indeed! You've enough to frighten you now! Who knows that the child may not be a cripple all his life? And that will be *your* doing. Do you understand that? Away with you! and the less I see of you for some time the better."

"Oh, Papa! *do* let me go to him. *Do* let me see baby."

"You shall not go to him. You shall not see him. And if you attempt to do so, it shall be worse for you than you suppose."

So saying, he banged the door, and strode downstairs.

Ellie supposed her father meant she was to go home alone, but for that she cared nothing. If she could see her mother, naughty as she had been, *she* would speak a soothing word to her. She knew not how much baby was hurt, but "very much—very much," that still-continued cry of pain seemed to make certain. "Oh!" she cried; "if I were not

such a naughty, wilful child ! Harry told me not to go there. Mama says I am always getting myself into trouble because I will not be guided. And now, if I have hurt dear little baby very much, what shall I do ? Oh ! what shall I do ? ”

“ My dear, are you coming ? ” said Sarah’s kind voice at that moment. “ Your Papa wishes us all to make haste and go, that the room may be quiet for poor baby. Come, let me put on your bonnet. ”

This was spoken as Sarah entered the room, before her eye had rested on Ellie’s face. When it had done so, her solicitude began to flow in a new channel. That face was so pale—not with its usual paleness, but with a strange, livid hue—with dark rings round the mouth and eyes ; and those eyes were so tearless, and yet so filled with fear and distress, so unchild-like in their expression of anxiety ! New forebodings filled Sarah’s mind, and she felt doubtful whether it would not be better to speak to Doctor Forrester on Ellie’s account, before they went home. On reflection, however, she decided that the thing most likely to be useful to her charge was to get her to bed as quickly as possible, and now to give her as hopeful an account of the baby as circumstances would justify. Sarah had seen her master’s excitement, and she knew that any attempt to call forth the father’s sympathy on Ellie’s behalf would be fruitless. Mrs. Woodford was engrossed with the infant. Besides all this, Ellie certainly had been wrong ; and this feeling, accompanied by many misgivings as to the ultimate effect of the accident on the baby, made the task of rightly administering comfort to the offender a difficult one. Still, the countenance before



her convinced Sarah that something tending to this end must be attempted ; and she said in a soothing voice—

“It’s a great mercy, isn’t it, my dear, that baby is not very badly hurt ? ”

“Then why does he cry like that ? ”

“One wrist is very much strained, and the sweet face and arms are sadly scratched and stung ; and that little lamb can’t bear pain quietly, you know. Oh ! Miss Ellie, what a blessing it is that we hear his voice at all, though it is in that dismal cry ! Now you must try to think of that to-night.”

The child raised her heavy eyes to the speaker’s face, and the kindness beaming from it opened the floodgates of her sorrow. She threw her arms round Sarah’s neck, and wept so passionately, that the maid was in despair.

“Hush ! hush ! my dear. You will make all worse than it is by this. If your Papa hears these sounds, he will be more angry still. Pray do try to stop.”

But Ellie still wept apparently without power to control herself ; and all Sarah could do was to press the child’s throbbing head to her side, and stroke it soothingly.

On the way home not a word was uttered, and each time Sarah looked on Ellie’s face she became more uneasy about her.

At parting, when Maud, kissing her affectionately, said, in tones such as Ellie had never heard from her before, “Don’t be so unhappy, dear Ellie. I watched Papa’s face all the time he was examining baby, and I don’t believe he thinks him much

hurt ;"—when David confirmed his sister's opinion, and Harry said he was quite sure baby would be well to-morrow, Ellie tried to smile, and to hope it might be as they said.

Kindly and gently Ellie was laid in her bed by Sarah's hand. Tears flowed again as she knelt to repeat her evening prayer, which lacked no urgency to-night.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Sarah had done her best for Ellie's comfort, she left her, hoping that perfect quiet would conduce to sleep. But, on returning, after an hour's absence, she saw there was little hope of that. The expression of anxiety was deepening on Ellie's face, and now her hands were burning with fever, and the pale cheeks were flushed.

Alone in the house, and no one near whom she could summon, Sarah gave up all thought of going to bed herself; and, making what preparations her limited experience suggested, she took her place at Ellie's side. It was an anxious night. A brief interval of troubled sleep would be broken by a start or a sudden cry; and every hour, as it passed, brought some new symptom which betokened serious illness.

Sarah watched for daylight impatiently, feeling that the object now to be attained was to get Dr. Forrester's advice as soon as possible. At last there came the sound of a door opening outside in the yard. She hastened to the window, and saw one of Mr. Tiverton's men going into the warehouse. So, gliding into the next room, she threw open the sash, and called to the man.

"Go," she said hurriedly, "to the house directly. Ring the bell loud, and send up word to Mrs. Tiverton that my young lady is ill ; and if she would please to come I should be so thankful ; there's nobody at home but me. I can't stay. Do go this moment."

"But I say ! This isn't my usual time. It's but just three o'clock."

"I know. Never mind. Go. I'm sure she'll come if you say Miss Ellie's very bad, and nobody here." And shutting the window without allowing opportunity for further parley, Sarah hastened back to her post.

Seated at Ellie's side, she listened breathlessly for Mrs. Tiverton's footstep. It came at length, and she hastened down to admit her.

Interrupting Sarah's prepared apology for disturbing her at such an hour, with "You were quite right in sending for me, Sarah. Go on. I'll follow you, and see the little girl directly"—she went noiselessly to the bedside, and, taking Ellie's wrist between her fingers, looked earnestly into her half-closed eyes. Then, turning to Sarah, she said—"She wants better advice than I can give. I sent to Dr. Forrester directly I received your message, but I'm sorry to find he has been out all night. When did this begin ? Miss Ellie seemed well when I saw her yesterday morning."

Sarah related the events of the previous evening.

"Well," said Mrs. Tiverton, "she evidently wants our best attention now. I trust Dr. Forrester may soon be here."

At this moment a quick, decided step was heard in the yard, which passed from it to the house.

Sarah ran down. A hurried whispering below followed, and in a few moments Dr. Forrester entered Ellie's room.

"I have only just received your note, my dear Madam. What is the matter here?"

Bending over Ellie, and taking her hand in his, he said, "This child is very ill." He made some inquiries of Sarah about the former part of the night. She had downstairs given him a hint about Mr. Woodford's violence, and told of Ellie's alarm as well as of her distress about the infant.

"Ah," he said, as he listened to Ellie's troubled breathing. "This little frame won't bear such shocks as these. Now I must go to the surgery directly. I shall not be gone long."

When remedies had been administered, it became necessary to consider how this addition to her troubles should be made known to Mrs. Woodford. The parents were engrossed with the babe, and both had been up all night. It was, therefore, after a prolonged discussion, decided that no alarm should be excited about Ellie till the doctor had seen both her and the infant in the middle of the day.

Noon came, and Dr. Forrester and Mr. Woodford met in the yard.

"Ah! I'm glad to see you, Doctor," said the latter. "You are going to the cottage, I suppose? The child is wonderfully better this morning. There seemed no necessity for my remaining there any longer. I'm in hopes, after all, nothing bad will come of this miserable business."

"I hope not, indeed. But I am afraid we are by no means at the end of it yet," said Dr. Forrester coldly.

"What! You see reason to fear, then, that other injuries may show themselves?"

"I was thinking of Ellie, not the infant. He, I trust, is likely to do well. I wish I could be equally hopeful about her."

"What do you mean, Doctor?" inquired Mr. Woodford, quite confounded by the speaker's words and manner.

Resolved if there was any warm place in the father's heart for the little girl, to find it out and work there, Dr. Forrester described her present state, and the way in which she had passed the night, adding,—“The shock she has received altogether is so great that I fear there is much anxiety in store for you on her account, and that you will see a change in her which must be very painful to you.”

"But what can have produced such a change in a few hours, Doctor?"

"Your observation as a parent must have shown you that she has highly susceptible nerves, and is of a very anxious temperament. It is obvious to any one that in this respect she is altogether unchildlike. She has, too, I am convinced, deep and strong affections, though she may rarely give them expression. I believe that few in mature life suffer more from apprehension for those they love than that child upstairs. Considering this mental sensitiveness, her delicate health, and the varied causes of painful excitement yesterday, I think her present illness is fully explained."

This speech astonished the listener more than he cared the speaker should surmise. How should Dr.

Forrester know so much about her feelings? As for his having divined rightly he did not believe a word of it.

Irresistible respect for Dr. Forrester restrained the expression of these thoughts. Mr. Woodford was therefore silent for a moment, and then said bitterly, "Well, Doctor, I suppose you don't envy the position fate assigns me? What is to be done now?"

"Whatever we can do to help and comfort both you and your wife shall be done," was the reply, though the shadow of what was passing in the father's mind had been gathering too plainly on his face to pass unnoticed by Dr. Forrester's observant eye. "But let us go up to Ellie's room. I was just on my way to see her before going to Mill Cottage. Mrs. Tiverton is there, and she will help us to concert some plan by which Mrs. Woodford may be effectually helped."

"Mrs. Tiverton! Do you mean that Ellie is so ill as to require her presence as well as Sarah's?"

"I do. Sarah sent for her early this morning. But come upstairs. I am anxious to see how my patient is going on."

They went up together. Ellie lay in a restless doze, broken, as before, by starting and cries; and on her face sat that expression of suffering and weakness which had been gradually creeping over it hour by hour since the previous day. Her father was evidently startled.

Turning to Dr. Forrester, he inquired if he was satisfied with the effect of the remedies of which he had already made trial.

"No, I am not. I must proceed to more vigorous measures at once, and Mrs. Woodford must come home as soon as it can be arranged without risk to herself."

The sound of voices in the room roused the patient, who, casting a hurried, frightened glance around, caught sight of her father, and with a scream that rang through the house attempted to jump out of bed.

"Oh ! save me, save me !" she shrieked. "Papa is so angry—so angry—because *Willie is dead*." The last words being uttered in a fearful whisper.

Dr. Forrester motioned Mr. Woodford away. They laid the trembling child down, endeavouring to soothe and reassure her. But she would take no comfort, till, clasped in Sarah's arms, she gradually sank again into unconsciousness.

Dr. Forrester gave his directions, and then left for Mill Cottage, telling Mrs. Tiverton that if it did not seem prudent to remove the infant that day, he should allow nothing to be said about Ellie till next morning.

When he arrived at the cottage he found the two ladies chatting pleasantly beside a little extemporized bed whereon the babe slept tranquilly. A moment after, the child began to stir, and in the movement his waking occasioned, Dr. Forrester contrived to give his wife a hint that he wanted to see her alone. Attention to the babe occupied some time, and when this was over, he told her that he had a patient to see at a short distance, and if she would put on her bonnet and walk with him he would give her the home budget by the way.

As soon as they were alone, Dr. Forrester told his wife of the distressing state of things in the Woodfords' home; and expressed his doubt whether Ellie had strength enough to battle with the disease which had thus suddenly and fiercely assailed her. "But," he added, "that poor mother looks so worn and weak, that I think I must venture on letting her get a night's rest before she takes her place in the sick-room. You must make some excuse for staying with her to-night. I will send and let you know the first thing to-morrow how Ellie is; and then if I report no improvement, get breakfast over, and tell her mother as carefully as you can. I will be at the cottage, if possible, to see the infant before nine o'clock; after that she can return home at once."

He then told her that Mrs. Tiverton had made arrangements for receiving the infant at her house, that perfect quiet might be preserved for Ellie; and leaving his wife to return to her friend, he hurried back to see the result of the last remedies he had directed to be used for his patient in Brooke's Yard.

It was not difficult to persuade Mrs. Woodford that Mrs. Forrester's presence for twenty-four hours longer was desirable; and, all unsuspectingly, she gave herself up to the pleasure of her friend's society, and the joy of watching over her little disfigured but certainly improving darling.

A night of quiet sleep blessed both babe and mother, and the latter awoke on that sweet May morning refreshed and strengthened.

The clock was on the stroke of seven, and Mrs. Forrester trembled at every footstep. "You look

much better this morning, Mary," she said. "You must have your breakfast before you get tired. I shall just go and speak about it."

"You need not go, Ann. If we ring, Kate Simpson will be sure to come."

"No. I prefer going myself," and here a sound on the stairs caused Mrs. Forrester to hurry away.

She was but just in time to prevent Dr. Forrester's note being brought to the door. It ran as follows:—

"No improvement. I am sorry to say Ellie has passed a distressing night, with almost unbroken delirium. I will enter more into detail when I see you. Let Mrs. Woodford know all by the time I come. She must return at once."

Mrs. Forrester stood for a moment reflecting, then gave her orders for breakfast; and dismissing anxiety from her face, returned to Mrs. Woodford.

"Why, Mary! There you are, playing with that baby still. I expected to find you half dressed."

"Then you were less reasonable in your expectations than usual, Mrs. Forrester, for I don't think you could have been gone three minutes."

"No judge of the lapse of time, Mary, when you are with that child. Why if he were your firstborn you could not be more weak over him."

"I question whether I was as 'weak' over my firstborn as over my little Freddie. By-the-by, Ann, you have not heard, I think, that his name is decided on. Frederick—Stanfield."

There was a pause and a rush of blood to the

speaker's face as the last name was pronounced, after which she went on hurriedly,—

“Ellie has been coaxing me to have the baptism at Wilton Church. She is so delighted with that place. I should like to indulge her if I can, and to have all our children present. Do you think you could spare a day in next week for us all to meet there?”

“I shall indeed be glad if your baby's baptism can take place then, Mary,” Mrs. Forrester replied, with an expression so grave that her friend feared she must be offended at the proposed name.

Mrs. Woodford was about to reply, when Mrs. Forrester interrupted her by saying,—“Now, my dear, make haste and come down to breakfast. All shall be ready for you. No more toying with the plaything, remember.”

Breakfast was passing over, and Mrs. Forrester, in much perplexity, sat considering and rejecting one plan after another for the disclosure of Ellie's illness. Till at last Mrs. Woodford said, “Ann, how grave and silent you have become all at once. The mention of that name, I fear, has given you pain, or perhaps you are getting anxious about home. You must go, after the doctor's visit this morning, and look into your own affairs. I shall get you to call and see Ellie for me too. It now occurs to me as strange that Sarah did not walk up with her here yesterday evening after they heard baby was better. They might so easily have done this. Sarah, too! who is so fond of my baby boy, and never forgets anything. George did not say a word about Ellie either; and I avoided speaking of her because I knew how much displeased he

had been with her. I am ashamed to think how absorbed I have been in this little treasure."

"I am sorry to tell you, Mary," said Mrs. Forrester reluctantly, "that Ellie is not well. The agitation of Tuesday was too much for her. I heard this from Dr. Forrester yesterday. But he thought it so important that you should have rest after your previous distress, that he wished me to wait till this morning before I mentioned it to you. But now you shall go to Ellie as soon as you like."

"Don't suppose, Ann," said Mrs. Woodford in a trembling voice, "you would be doing me a kindness by concealing anything now. Is Ellie very ill?"

"I fear she is. I have heard of her this morning."

Mrs. Forrester then described Ellie's state as gently as she could, and told of Mrs. Tiverton's attendance on her, and of the provision made for the babe's reception at her house when they should return to Brooke's Yard.

The mother covered her face with her hands, in half-bewildered distress, yet still hoping things were better than they were represented. In a few moments Dr. Forrester arrived, and the friends both hastened to meet him.

"You bring bad news, Doctor, I know," said Mrs. Woodford. "Is there *any* improvement since your note this morning?"

"I fear not. But we must try to look on the bright side of things. And remember how fortunate it is that your anxieties are lessened about the infant. Now I do not mean to detain you here. You know Mrs. Tiverton's plan for you? Establish

baby at her house, and then go to Ellie. Miss Susan and Sarah are with her."

Arrived once more in her dreary home, Mrs. Woodford hastened to Ellie's side.

There in the darkened room, with Miss Tiverton beside her applying wetted cloths to her head, lay the wreck of what two days before had been her pretty, delicate-looking child; so changed, that even the mother's eye would hardly have recognised her,—tossing from side to side, talking incessantly with such rapidity that the new listener felt as if she could not bear the sound.

"Does my Ellie know Mama? See, I've come back to nurse you. Dear baby does not want all my time now, he is so much better."

The fresh voice seemed to arrest the sick child's attention for a moment. But she gave no sign that she recognised her mother, and went on again talking as before; the prominent ideas apparently in her mind being, that she had done some dreadful mischief to Willie, that her father was trying to find her that he might inflict punishment, and that her mother had left her, and would never notice her again. She called on Sarah and Harry by turns, to save her and love her still; and was continually making an effort to jump out of bed, as if to escape from some one.

Day succeeded day, and point after point, at which Dr. Forrester expected some change must occur, was reached and passed. Painful symptoms one after another arose, but the mortal part still held its immortal guest. Worn almost to a shadow, the poor little body tortured with remedies and

utterly helpless,—the last day, when a crisis might be looked for, arrived.

In reply to the mother's anxious inquiries, Dr. Forrester said, "She is alive. That is the only fact from which I can suggest hope."

Night drew on. All that medical skill could devise had been tried ; and now in deep silence the attendants listened to the sick child's breathing, standing by turns beside her bed. So feeble had that breathing become that the most strained attention could scarcely catch its sound. So hour after hour passed, and morning began to dawn. Many times during the night the doctor held a glass to the child's lips, believing she was gone. But once more the light of day struggled into the room and showed the pale watchers the object of their care still amongst the living.

As the first sunbeam began to spread itself over the still sleeping town, and made its way amongst the tokens of that desperate battle between life and death which was going on where Ellie lay, there was a movement—a sigh—the slightest possible, yet heard by all.

The doctor rose quickly, and bent down his ear, till it almost touched the attenuated features. Each of the others pressed forward noiselessly, believing all was over, and searching his face with dread, expecting to read in it a confirmation of their fears.

The expression of that face changed rapidly. First, a sad earnest gaze into Ellie's half-closed eyes said almost certainly that the spirit had fled. Then the glass was placed before the lips, and laid down with a reassured manner. Then another long,

breathless listening—a satisfied inclination of the head, and—could it possibly be?—a smile!

Gently moving his position, he wrote on a slip of paper, and gave it into the mother's hand,—

“Genuine sleep at last. Keep very still.”

CHAPTER IX.

It is early morning in the glowing month of August. The sun is just gilding the tops of the trees, and making sparkles in the stately river. A heavy dew weighs down the folded flowers, and a soft haze speaks of a coming day of warmth and gladness. The earliest labourer is hardly yet astir, and rustlings in the branches, with only an occasional chirp and twitter, tell that even the birds have but just discovered that it is day.

About and within Smith's farm all yet is still—all but in one upper chamber,—a large, airy room, one casement of which looks out on the little flower-garden and the stream, the other into the walnut-tree which supports the *swing* (of which we have before spoken). The room is barely furnished, but perfectly clean and neat. A large, old-fashioned bed stands on one side ; and on it are Ellie and Harry, bending over a large book, and talking earnestly in whispers to each other, while Sarah lies still sleeping on a smaller bed close by.

Ellie's recovery had been slow and fluctuating. For many days after she fell into that life-restoring sleep her existence seemed still to rest on so frail a

basis, that only the most watchful care could secure it from destruction. None could be better tended than she was, yet the bright month of June was gone before she could even be lifted into another room.

The pressing danger of Ellie's illness had no sooner passed by, than Dr. Forrester urged Mrs. Woodford's removal to Mill Cottage, for the change which had been so painfully interrupted. Her pale face and weary eyes silently seconded this suggestion ; and, in anxious perplexity, the father set himself to the consideration of ways and means.

Ellie's illness had entailed expense, and his income was inadequate to support the additional one now of a double housekeeping for two invalids. At this embarrassing moment he received a letter from his friend Mr. Stanfield (the friend who had stood by him both with advice and purse in all the headlong course of his early life)—formal and quaint, as all his epistles were, but kind withal, as they rarely failed to be. It expressed a hope that "Dame Woodford" would soon clear her house of sickness ; he had heard of nothing but illness there for so many weeks, that he began to think it was time it was all laid aside. He meant to make a journey to Stockington himself, to see what sort of angling it afforded ; and, as it would seem in this world that money had a wonderful power in setting things right, he enclosed a piece of paper which he hoped would have that effect, as he wanted to come before the days grew shorter, and could not, of course, do so till every one was well.

This letter, and the "piece of paper" it con-

tained, gave a turn to the whole aspect of affairs in Brooke's yard. Mrs. Woodford and her babe again took possession of the rooms at Mill Cottage, leaving Ellie with a full staff of nurses in Sarah and the Tiverton and Forrester neighbours. It was arranged also that, when she should be sufficiently recovered to benefit by the change, she was to go under Sarah's care to spend a month at Smith's farm, and Dr. Forrester promised Harry as her companion ; and the present chapter opens on the morning after their arrival there.

The children had not met since the sad evening when the accident occurred at Mill Cottage ; and now, too happy and excited to sleep, almost with the dawn Harry had crept from his little bed in an adjoining closet, to take a peep at Ellie. Finding her awake, he did not return to it ; but soon, at her suggestion, possessed himself of the book which, by its store of pictures, promised well for their amusement, and, taking his seat by her side, they conned it together. Their faces had changed from brightness to horror in looking through and spelling out the titles of those gloomy pictures, and Ellie's pale cheek and languid eye were giving proof that she had overtaxed her strength, when a knock at the door awoke Sarah, who, rousing herself at the sound, bade the intruder "come in ;" and she then saw how the children were engaged.

"Why, my dears, whatever is the matter with you ?" she said. "Ellie, you look tired out. Don't you feel so well as you did last night, my dear ?"

"I *am* tired now, Sarah. But we've been happy for a long time. Only that book is so *very* dreadful ;"

and, heaving a sigh, she threw herself back on the pillow.

"Oh, pretty dears! They've got at the old 'Book of Martyrs,' " said Mrs. Smith, whom the intruder proved to be. "But never mind; we'll put it away, and forget all about it. See what I've brought to do Missie good"—and she held out a foaming cup of new milk. "There, now drink it, dear! And a good many such draughts will help to put some flesh on these poor little arms, I hope."

Mrs. Smith's hopes were realized. Ellie drank new milk, ate fresh eggs, and breathed country air, till, from being the poor little invalid carried up and down stairs, and lifted to some shady spot in the garden or beside the river, she became able to walk hand in hand with Harry about the farm and garden. As strength increased, the day seemed hardly long enough for all the pleasures it brought. Something was always going on, either within doors or without, which interested the children; and Mrs. Smith, who had none of her own, was never so pleased as when they were following her about.

The dairy was the greatest attraction, being something quite new to both. And then, when Ellie could rise early enough, it was a wonderful treat on market days to assist in the preparations, and to watch the rich-looking pats of butter, which they had seen beaten up in the dairy, laid on snowy cloths in the wide open basket, in company with Mrs. Smith's delicious cream cheeses, covered so carefully with fresh, cool dock leaves. A second basket required especial care in the packing, for its freight was yet more delicate. New-laid eggs claimed

the largest share of its space, but a corner was left for little nosegays, tied up the evening before, and sent to pass the night in the back kitchen, ranged round a great baking-dish of water, to preserve their freshness. To see Polly off with these treasures, dressed in her Sunday best, her good-humoured face quite glistening in the sunshine with the rubbing it had undergone to assist in fitting its owner for a suitable appearance in the butter-market, was a pleasure looked forward to all the week.

Neither the dairy, however, nor the preparations for Stockington Market, were the only early morning pleasures which a farmhouse life afforded.

The poultry-yard was a little world of interests. The grain which was to supply breakfast for that multitude of feathered creatures was given to the children to deal out themselves; and to watch the effects which followed the throwing of a new handful—the indiscriminate huddling together of ducks, fowls, geese, and turkeys—the pecking, squabbling, and flying over each other, which ensued—was an amusement which would have outlasted several such portions of barley and oats as Mrs. Smith thought enough to satisfy her poultry.

And then, when all was distributed, to run away and hunt in the hen-house and farm-yard for new-laid eggs, and find them actually warm, and hidden about in such odd places—what was there in Stockington, or any other town, that would equal such pleasures as these?

The great black turkey-cock and the old gander proved to be just that little dash of the vexatious which Ellie was beginning to find in all her enjoy-

ments, and which she thought it "so strange" that there should always be.

The farm-kitchen was found fully to equal the yard and dairy in the novelty of its employments. Baking-day was a high festival. Then Ellie and Harry had each a piece of dough given them, to be converted, by their own hands, into a "real loaf," which, after being tortured into a dozen different shapes (a process which occupied the whole time while the week's bread for the household was being briskly moulded into its homely form by Mrs. Smith and Polly), was allowed to take its place in the oven, and eventually came out (it seemed a long time, though!) a veritable loaf, all brown and crusty, as loaves should be. That was a proud moment when a slice of "my own bread" was handed to the farmer at his supper-time, and pronounced by him to be better than any bread Mrs. Smith or Polly had ever made in their lives (at all events, it pleased *him* better).

Even washing-day—that dreaded time when tempers fail, and discomfort asserts universal sway—was made but a new scene of busy importance to the children. They were kept aloof from the immediate focus of steam and soap-suds. But little pans were provided by Mrs. Smith, and placed in the deep window-seat of the kitchen, where she said they might make just as much mess as they liked, for Polly could clear it all up in five minutes. There they rubbed and splashed.

Ellie's frock pinned up behind, and Harry's pin-before, of course, subjected to a like confinement—an apron of Sarah's tied about each, to represent as

closely as possible an apron and bib—and a pile of small articles gleaned from her own and their wardrobes placed on the ground beside them, gave the whole ceremony so decidedly a business-like air, that the farmer, being fetched in by his wife to see the performance, declared “they were the wonderfulest little pair in the world ; and that, if they stayed much longer, the Missus would find that nothing in the house could be done without them.”

Ironing followed. Mrs. Smith produced her smallest implements, and near her, at the long ironing-board, they were plied with plenty of zeal, if the skill was not great ; Ellie kneeling on a chair, and Harry at her side, seated, boy-fashion, with his legs folded under him. Sundry blisters on fingers and palms made a slight drawback to the pleasure of ironing. But, after a second attempt, they became more expert, and could show the hands to Farmer Smith at supper-time uninjured—a proof incontrovertible that they were improving in the art.

When in-door amusement slackened, they sought the shady spot under the walnut-tree by the river-side, where, with Sarah’s instruction, they plaited the long, cord-like grass which grew in tufts here and there amongst the rest, and then sewed it up into baskets—little crooked, misshapen things, it must be owned, but winning from the farmer and his wife the warmest applause, and kept by them for years after, as mementoes of their young guests.

At evening milking, Sarah would take her work and let the children sit on the bank by her side, close to where “old James” was filling the cans for the dairy ; when he would tell them of the distant

home where his childhood and youth had passed, and of the good mother—in heaven long ago—who had taken such pains to lead him in the right way when he was a boy no bigger than themselves. On comparing notes, the children found that James knew many of their favourite hymns ; and he soon persuaded them to try how they would sound if sung instead of said (James was a great man in the village choir, and had a store of tunes at his command). And so well did master and pupils enter into each other's ideas, that these evening concerts soon came to be considered one of the especial and particular pleasures amongst the many by which the children were now surrounded.

When Sunday came, Sarah in the morning read the Lessons for the day, and the Psalms and Collect. In the afternoon the farmer rowed the whole party, including Mrs. Smith, up to Wilton, himself, to attend service there ; and, as they were always early, Mr. Smith, taking a hand of each child, would stroll with them round the churchyard, and amongst the graves, and tell them of those he had known once in health and bloom, now lying quietly beneath their feet ; and of the strange gentleman who had bought the old Manor-house there opposite, and had done it up so nicely, and then, just as it was all ready, how he had gone off to the wars, and been killed. And now there was the place, which any one might have “for a song ;” and if somebody did not take it soon, it would be all falling to pieces again.

When the time came for assembling in church, how sweet it was to sit with door and windows open, looking out upon the beautiful trees, and listening

to the rooks and the sheep-bell—the only sounds which met the ear, save when now and then the mirth of a party of hardly-tasked mechanics (some of those who, free to quit their looms for this one day, had come to seek air and sunshine, and forget for the time their work-day toil) broke less soothingly upon it.

There was no earnest voice sounding within the house of God to win these pleasure-seekers there, and mingle with that day's merriment words which might abide in their hearts amidst the labours of the coming week, teaching how spirit and flesh may be refreshed, and yet the Sabbath not, as now, dishonoured. A few would perhaps stray to the door, and linger in the porch, and listen for a while ; but the dull monotonous voice and heavy discourse soon wearied them, and they went their way.

"Farmer Smith, do you know what I've been thinking of?" said Ellie, as they rowed home on one of these Sunday afternoons.

"No, my dear, I do *not*. It wasn't the sermon, I take it. Even a sharp little maid like you wasn't likely to think much about what nobody could understand."

"Oh! no. It wasn't the sermon. I couldn't tell what that was about a bit. And I didn't try to listen after just the first."

"Well, that's honest, anyhow," said the farmer.

"But Ellie," interposed Sarah, "it wasn't right not to try, because you might perhaps have heard something that you could remember."

"Oh! well, don't look grave, that's a dear Sarah. I'll try next Sunday. But now I want to tell you

all, what I've been thinking of. It would be just as nice, Sarah, for you as for me—nice for us all."

"Do tell us, Ellie," said Harry; "would it be nice for me too?"

"Yes, of course. I don't think anything nice without you, Harry."

The farmer smiled, Harry looked gratified, and Ellie proceeded to unfold her 'thoughts.'

"It's about that house, Mr. Smith, that pretty old house at Wilton, which you said would only cost a very little money. Mama told me before I came to your farm that I should not go back to live in that dismal yard at Stockington any more, but that we are going to have lodgings at Mill Cottage till Papa can see a nice house somewhere quite out of the town, that is not expensive. And all at once in church I thought how delightful it would be for us to come and live there!"

"But Ellie," said Harry in dismay, "that wouldn't be my home; and it's such a *very* long way from where we live."

"Why Harry! you silly boy! Don't you see what a great house it is, and that there would be plenty of room for you? And what do you think I heard your Mama say the day before I came to farmer Smith's? She and Mama were sitting talking together in whispers, because they thought I was asleep, and your Mama said,—'Now, my dear Mary, we'll let those children be together as much as they like for the next year or two. They seem so fond of each other, that it's quite cruel to separate them,' and then Mama said, 'Yes, poor little things. We may give them that indulgence,

I think.' They didn't know I heard ; but of course after that they mean to let us be almost always together, either at our house or your Papa's. Oh ! how delightful it will all be ! "

And in imagination Ellie was soon settled at Wilton, with Harry a constant guest. Then followed an air-built castle, to which turrets, domes, and pinnacles were added so rapidly that when the boat touched the shore, under the great walnut-tree, Ellie started with surprise, and the farmer laughingly asked her where she had been for the last ten minutes.

Harry, meanwhile, only half-assured by the overheard discourse between the mamas, thought the plan a doubtful one, and hoped that something more promising to his own interests would eventually be decided on.

CHAPTER X.

WE must now look for a few moments into the dingy yard at Stockington.

Henceforth our visits there will lead us only to the private door of Mr. Tiverton's house ; but Ellie's departure was succeeded by such energetic proceedings in that gloomy place, that we must take a parenthetical glance at their results.

As soon as the sick child was placed in the post-chaise which would convey her to Smith's farm, Mrs. Woodford began to prepare for exchanging Brooke's Yard for the lodgings at Mill Cottage as a present home. Mr. Stanfield's coming must no longer be delayed ; and he was to be received at the cottage.

There were necessarily, therefore, some days of hard work to be got through before that order could be produced in the new home which was essential to the bachelor's comfort.

The whole party of Tiverton ladies, helpful at all times, now gave by turns their aid. Miss Susan packed (as she did everything else) slowly but surely. She never looked hot. No part of her dress became ruffled. Even her broad-plaited frill

maintained its bristling neatness, and stood erect amid the down-coming of bedsteads and the inverted position of things generally.

The end of the week saw the move accomplished, and early in the one following Mr. Stanfield was expected. Two more rooms had been added to the original upstairs accommodation at Mill Cottage ; one for Ellie and Sarah, another for guests. On this latter room Mrs. Woodford had especially concentrated her attention, to make it as far as possible what would please their kind and liberal, though somewhat fidgetty friend.

The gentleman duly arrived on the day he was expected, weary and dusty with his night journey, and ready to avail himself of the appliances provided for his refreshment and accommodation.

With a heart full of gratitude for his many acts of kindness in times of need, Mrs. Woodford prepared to humour and please her guest in all his bachelor fancies and peculiarities as far as she knew them. These mainly consisted in a natural antipathy to children, and an inordinate love for angling and for tea !

Congratulating herself, therefore, on Ellie's safe establishment at Smith's farm, his hostess arranged that at the tea hour Baby should always be out of the way, and herself engrossed by no other care than making her friend comfortable.

Little Freddie's christening, now that the chief sponsor was at hand, was fixed to take place at Wilton the week following Mr. Stanfield's arrival, Miss Tiverton and Dr. Forrester being the other God-parents. These, with the other members of

the two families, including David and Maud, were to accompany Mr. and Mrs. Woodford to Wilton, and there be met by Sarah with Ellie and Harry ; and after the ceremony all were to go together and dine and spend the remainder of the day at Smith's farm, the two anglers strolling along the banks of the river with their fishing-rods, and joining the others at tea-time.

We must now return to Ellie and Harry.

The evening was still and lovely. Harvest had begun, and all hands about the farm were full of business. Sarah and the children had been sitting the whole day in the harvest-field, keeping close beside the hedge, and changing their position as the sun came round. Their dinners had been given them, tied up in two little bags provided by Mrs. Smith, and a good supply of whey in a stone bottle was committed to Sarah's care for their use ; these preparations being intended to give their refreshments as much as possible the appearance of those carried by the reapers. They had been entrusted, too, with Mr. Smith's own jar of ale ; and highly delighted were they when he came and asked them to serve him out a cupful.

Busy as the reapers were, the young occupants of the corner under the hedge were, in their way, busier still. Two little baskets were being secretly manufactured from the wheat straw, to be filled with the new grain, as appropriate offerings to the owners of the land on which it grew.

The sun was going down, and the reapers were putting on their coats and taking up their kegs and wallets, before the baskets were completed and filled ;

and the children, with their attendant, reached the farm just as Polly, returning from Stockington Market, stopped at the washhouse-door.

"Anything for me?" inquired Sarah, who always on market days received some communication from her mistress.

"Yes, here's a bit of a note;" and Polly produced the missive from her ample pocket.

When the contents were made known, and it was understood that Baby was next Thursday coming to Wilton to be christened in the pretty church there, and was then to be brought to the farm, where he could be shown to, and seen by everybody, there was a general expression of joy, and cares—hospitable—at once took possession of Mrs. Smith's mind. Mrs. Woodford begged that the preparations might be as simple as possible, and confined entirely to what the farm could produce. But the note put the good housewife in a flutter of anxiety as to whether it could be made to produce anything good enough for a 'christening dinner'; and the slaughter of poultry and sucking-pigs, custards spoilt in the boiling, and pies done-for in the oven, mingled with her dreams all that night.

The auspicious Thursday came at length. A day of glorious beauty, warm and still. At eleven o'clock the children and Sarah must start, to be at Wilton by the time the christening party should arrive from the town. James was to row them up in the boat, and to bring back in it whoever of the guests felt indisposed for the walk.

Some time before eleven o'clock struck the children were dressed and impatiently awaiting James's

appearance. He was punctual to a minute ; and in due time Ellie and Harry were standing together under the shadow of the elm-tree on Wilton-green, looking earnestly across the meadows.

They had not stood there long before the carriage which brought the ladies arrived. There was a little further waiting under the tree till the gentlemen, who had preferred walking, came up. Then the clergyman's horse was seen coming towards the village from an opposite direction, and the whole party hastened across the green, entered the church, and the service began.

All went on well ; the little unconscious one cooing in Miss Tiverton's arms in contented ease, while his mother's heart was echoing to the prayer that " God would in His infinite mercy look upon that child ; that He would wash and sanctify him, and grant him so to pass the waves of this troublesome world, that he might finally come to the land of everlasting life."

But the moment came for his being transferred to the minister's arms, that the blessing of the triune God might be pronounced upon him, and he might be sealed with the sign of the cross, " in token that henceforth he should not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and should fight manfully under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end." This transfer was too formidable a thing to be borne quietly. One terror-stricken glance into the stranger's face, and all quiet fled, till he was restored to his mother's arms and hushed to peace

by her familiar voice. Ellie was struck, for the first time, by the different sound of Freddie's resolute cry, from the plaintive tones in which all sorrow had been wont to burst from Willie's heart. The mother had often marked it too. To her it brought hope that there was strength to battle with the pain and sorrow of this "troublesome world." To Ellie, the gentle sounds of distress never to be forgotten, had been tenfold more endearing.

Nothing could turn out better than did all the culinary preparations so zealously made by Mrs. Smith. Everything was praised ; and ample proof given that everything was approved.

Mrs. Woodford's great anxiety, however, was centred on the tea. And as she sat resting under the walnut-trees when dinner was over, chatting with her lady guests, she sent many thoughts towards the coming meal. Her anxiety was allayed, however, when, as the time drew near for the gentlemen's arrival, she went into the best parlour to take a survey of the preparations.

Baby was now dismissed out of earshot under Sarah's care ; and Ellie and Harry were charged to eat their tea in silence, and when they were tired of sitting, to creep out of the room with all possible quietness. Miss Tiverton was established at the tea-tray, and was assured by Mrs. Smith that there should be an unlimited supply of boiling-water at her command without a moment's delay. Things thus laid in train, and all being in readiness excepting the tea-pot, Ellie and Harry were stationed at a point commanding both banks of the river for as great a distance as its winding course thereabout

gave to the eye at once; and they no sooner ran breathless to the house to announce that the gentlemen were in sight, than Miss Tiverton put in the tea, and felt that her responsibilities were beginning.

Ellie had no recollection of her father's friend; and as children always expect to derive especial gratification from witnessing any peculiarity, however uninteresting, she was now bent on taking notes of the manners and customs of that gentleman at his tea. She had heard directly from her mother that Mr. Stanfield's comfort largely depended on that meal being undisturbed; and she had also taken in, with peculiar zest, certain whispered remarks *not* intended for her ear, which, being magnified by her own imagination, led her to place "tea-time with Mr. Stanfield" in the same category as "feeding-time at Exeter Change." She was now, therefore, highly expectant, and on her best behaviour. Sitting in perfect stillness by her mother's side, she now and then crept, at her direction, to Mr. Stanfield's, and, standing near him, held out at arms'-length and tight in both hands, a plate of bread and butter cut especially for him. Whereupon she received a commendation for being "such a quiet, orderly lass, that he did not know she was in the room"—the highest praise Mr. Stanfield could possibly bestow.

Ellie watched and sat still, till childish patience could endure no longer. A quick eye near saw that the limit was reached. A nod and smile dismissed the younger ones from their bondage; and they slipped away, followed at short intervals by Maud, David, and Emma Tiverton.

A prolonged visit to dairy, pigs, and poultry, was followed by a general move in the direction of the swing.

"Run, Harry, and ask Mrs. Smith who can come to swing us," said Ellie.

Harry obeyed, and reappeared with Polly at his side, whose sturdy arm was just what was wanted. And they were all soon trying in turn to outdo each other in feats of daring.

Mrs. Smith, relieved from the anxieties of the kitchen, which had so encompassed her during the day, was cooling herself in the garden, and making up gigantic nosegays as parting offerings to her elder guests.

The shadows were lengthening, before the party from the tea-room came out into the fresh air. The ladies looked hot, but as if greatly content that the meal was really and well over at last. Mr. Stanfield, soothed and comforted, had reached his most benignant phase. Walking leisurely to the walnut-tree, he watched and commended the swingers, relating to Miss Tiverton, meanwhile, tales of his own boyish prowess—that lady's mode of acquitting herself at the tea-table having led her to a distinguished place in his favour.

It was time now to think of returning home. The pleasant day was drawing in, and night would be about the homeward-bound party before little Freddie could be laid in his crib.

Ellie was exhorted to make haste and get strong, for the weeks were flying past, and, as soon as Mr. Stanfield left, she must go to Mill Cottage, and set hard to work at her lessons.

The farewells and thanks given and received, were over at last. The two Mamas, with Freddie and Rachel, took boat and were rowed away ; and the others were soon lost to sight as they strolled along the river-side amongst the trees. Ellie and Harry stood watching them, waving a hand when any one turned to give another parting nod ; and when they could be seen no longer, the children hugged and kissed their hostess, telling her they were "*so* glad they were not gone too," and that they thought it would be a nice plan for them to live with her always, and for parties of their friends to come now and then to see them at the Farm, just as they had done to-day !

CHAPTER XI.

THE days passed swiftly by. So happy, every one as it came; so delightful, the morning's busy stir, and the evening's unrestrained prattle at the Farmer's side, that the children dreaded the summons which would separate them from a life so full of novelty and freedom. It came at length.

Mr. Stanfield's visit had extended to several weeks beyond the term he had originally intended. But the time of his departure, once fixed, was not likely to be changed; and Polly, one Saturday evening, on her return from market, produced from her pocket the expected but unwelcome recall.

A scene which made Polly stare followed the reading of this document. But Sarah knew Ellie's temperament well now, and allowed the storm to subside before she attempted to dwell on the more acceptable passages in Mrs. Woodford's note, or to say much in the way of consolation.

When, however, the violent bursts of tears and passionate exclamations dwindled into silence and sobbing, and Harry (more frightened by Ellie's angry distress than grieved even to leave Smith's Farm) was drying his eyes, and trying to whisper

encouragement to his companion, Sarah again took up the note, and read aloud as follows :—

“I do not wish the call home to come too suddenly upon the children. Mr. Stanfield leaves on Tuesday, but they may stay at the Farm till Friday ; and I hope to arrange with Mrs. Forrester for Harry’s remaining a week at Mill Cottage before he goes back to Stockington. Tell him he must come and help to settle Ellie in at her new home.”

“Oh, that is very kind of your Mama, Ellie !” said Harry. “Don’t let us cry any more ! I dare say we shall be happy when we go back.”

“And nearly a whole week longer to be here !” said Sarah ; “and Harry coming to stay with us when we get home ! Why, Ellie, you’ll be able to make that little place by the parlour window quite a nice play-room before he goes. I wonder what you’ll call it ! Come, now, just try to think of all these pleasant things. How different it would be if we were going back to Brooke’s Yard instead of to that nice, cheerful cottage !”

Mr. and Mrs. Smith were not behindhand with consolatory suggestions ; and, as they all sat chatting together (when the tears were dried) round the table, while the Farmer ate his supper, many important plans for the future were discussed.

It was agreed that every effort should be used to induce the parents to let the children pay an annual visit to the Farm ; that Mr. Smith should call at Mill Cottage every time he went to market (which a

slight change in his accustomed route would make practicable) to see them ; and that Ellie (who insisted on taking that task upon herself) should persuade her Mama and Mrs. Forrester to let Harry spend every Saturday there, that Farmer Smith might see them both together.

Mrs. Smith made promise of presents from the Farm which should be found in a corner of Polly's basket, and left as she passed the door, which (like her Master) she henceforth should do. So, before they went to rest, the distant prospect had brightened up considerably.

The heaviest part of the trouble to Ellie was, that, with the return of Sunday, they were beginning to go through their round of pleasures for the "*last time*." Harry, in his happy, childlike feelings, would have forgotten the rapidly-nearing farewells, in the pleasure of each hour as it came. But Ellie was of a different mould ; and to her spirit clung the heavy thoughts which belong to partings in maturer life. No more of those pleasant journeys in the boat to church ! No quiet walk in the evening about the garden and by the river-side, with the Farmer, and his wife, and Sarah all together ! No more studying the pictures in the great Bible by the Farmer's side, or reading to him verse by verse in turn, as they had done for so many Sundays ! Gone—all gone ! Oh, if there were only *something* pleasant or dear in the world, which would not alter, or die, or leave us ! So yearned Ellie's heart, as in utter silence she sat, while the boat, gliding on its course, bore the travellers to the house of God.

Amongst all the simple retainers at Smith's Farm,

none felt more regret when the summons came for the departure of the little guests than good old James. He had taken much interest in the children, had thought often on remarks made by Ellie, had noted Sarah's attention, and the gravity which came into Harry's eye when he spoke of blessings and joys of which as yet neither knew anything. And to his faith, a harvest glowed, even before the seed had taken root. When, therefore, as he walked away with his cans to the accustomed milking-place by the hedge-side, and saw them following him, as they had so often done throughout those pleasant weeks, he felt as if his tears could have answered those which came into Ellie's eyes, when she said sadly,—

“We are to go away on Friday, James; but we mean to come every night at milking time, till we *do* go.”

“Well, my dear, I don't think you're more sorry than I am. But we've had a happy time, and we mustn't be ungrateful for the pleasure because it can't last for ever. We know that all our pleasures here are to be shorter than our pains. But it won't be always like that—blessed be His name! Our Saviour opened to us those gates which'll shut out for ever all manner of trouble. No more fear of parting or change when we're safe inside *them*!”

“Oh, James,” said Ellie, “how I wish we might be good and happy *here*! I'm sure it's a beautiful, lovely world, if the pleasant things would only last, instead of flying away so very fast! I wish there were no such thing as *Sin*; and then God would be pleased with us, and not take away everything we love from us!”

"Oh, my dear, you mustn't look on it like that ! That seems as if we got our blessings somewhere else, and God was a cruel tyrant watching to snatch them away from us. Why, if I were to begin telling up your mercies, I don't know where I could stop ! And yet, though the Almighty has given so much, that child's voice of yours complains against Him—because one pleasure He gave you has come to an end, after lasting a'most twice as long as you expected ! "

"James, I don't want to be ungrateful ; but I am so very sorry to go away ! Besides it's all being so pretty and nice, I get on better here than I do at home. Papa is so often angry with me."

"There's trouble everywhere, Missie ; and you'd soon find there was here as well as at home in some way or other."

"Then, James, if we must have trouble, and there's nothing else that will make us fit to go to heaven, I think it's a great pity we live in such a beautiful world, and have friends ; for we can't help loving them, you know ; and then it seems, when we do love anything very much, it must be taken away from us."

"Well, my dear, hasn't God said we haven't yet come to the land He means to give us ? And so, when we begin (as you was saying) 'to love anything very much indeed'—more than we love *Him*, Missie,—God *does* often take it away, just because He wouldn't have us make any mistake about it, and fancy we've come to our rest before the journey's half over. Not that He doesn't love us, my dear ! But because He's got better than the best here, in

store for them as have faith and patience to look and wait for it. You don't fancy that this world, with the curse for sin upon it, is as beautiful as that which God is preparing, where His people are to live with Him for ever?"

"No, I suppose it cannot be half so beautiful. But I don't like to think of it, because people must be so very good to go there; and I really *can-not* be good, for I've tried."

"Not of yourself, my dear, I suppose, any more than anybody else. But did you ever think about asking God to make you good? There's a short prayer in His Word, which, if you put up with all your heart, I know will bring you help."

"Oh, do tell me what it is, James! I've a particular reason for wanting to know."

"It's in the Fifty-first Psalm:—'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.'"

"That's it! That's the very one! I've said it over and over again; and it wasn't the least use."

James smiled, and shook his head. "Ah," he said, "but while you were saying it with your lips, you was settling in your own mind how bravely you'd triumph in the next temptation."

"How do you know that?" said Ellie, with a look of astonishment.

"By a heart in here" (laying his hand to his side), "which has often done just the same thing, my dear?"

"Has it really, James? And then couldn't *you* be good? But how did you say it when you *were* able to do right, and not get in a passion, but speak

gently as you always do even to that cross, horrid man who comes to thatch the ricks?"

"Missie, when I first began to be able to overcome myself was when I went first to my Saviour's feet, *knowing* that I was poor and blind and helpless, and when I told Him that I had tried hard to do it all for myself without His help, but that I was no better, but rather grew worse, and now if He would but undertake for me I'd give it up and work His way, He heard and came to me, and did help me. And now, though I'm just as bad in myself as I was at first, He has taught me where I may always go for what I want, and He never sends me empty away when I ask for needful grace and strength."

Ellie's eyes were fixed thoughtfully on the ground. She offered no reply.

Sarah, as if a light from heaven shone on her, through the old man's words, pondered them in her heart. No earthly eye looked on, whilst, as the children slept, she knelt that night—all unconscious to herself how long—wrestling in prayer for the gift James had obtained. One only heard, and knew how truly Self was laid aside—how fervently the resolve was taken to "work His way," and depend on Him for all. None heard but He to whom the humble, earnest cry was raised, and to whom such cry is never raised in vain. That was a night of solemn memory. A mighty stone was cast into the bosom of a quiet lake. It wakened into life the motionless waters; and who shall say how wide the circling eddies spread!

CHAPTER XII.

THE first day of separation from the friends at Smith's Farm was over.

All the rooms at Mill Cottage appropriated to the use of the Woodfords had been examined and criticized. Ellie's store of valuables was arranged in the "corner cupboard"—a piece of furniture in the parlour especially given up to the children's use. The excavation at the back of the house had also obtained its share of attention, and the friends were already engrossed with plans of improvement in this spot, which it was decided should be called "the Grotto."

A bright afternoon succeeding a week of unsettled weather was inviting for beginning operations in this henceforth favourite retreat, and the children had been chattering away during the early dinner about transformations to take place there, under Ellie's inventive genius, and with Harry's effective aid.

The garden, from which access to the grotto was gained, was situated at the back of the house. The only entrance to it was by a wicket-gate in the hedge by which it was surrounded. To reach

this gate, it was necessary to pass through the rick-yard.

"Is Sarah going with us, Mama?" said Ellie, as she put on her bonnet.

"No, my dear. That is unnecessary. I shall be sitting here at work ; and if you want my opinion about your alterations, I shall be at hand to give it, you know."

"Then how are we to get round to the gate, Mama? I can't go unless some one is with us."

"Ellie! What are you thinking of? Sarah tells me you ran about from morning till night at Smith's Farm ; and what difficulty can there be in going round the corner of the house without an attendant, here?"

"Ah, Mama, but I wasn't afraid of anything at Smith's Farm, and I am here!"

"And pray, Ellie, what is there to be afraid of here?—not the cows, I suppose?"

"No, Mama! I'm not afraid of cows. But what should I do if that dreadful man were to be in the rick-yard!—I *can't* go!" she added, with a determined gesture. "Let us play indoors, Harry, till Sarah can go with us."

Mrs. Woodford considered a moment, and then said,—

"Ellie, we will not inquire whether that was a fancy of yours or not ; but, remember, when people know they're doing wrong they are easily frightened. It was some poor man, perhaps, tired and hot with work, who was watching you walk up that steep path with baby in your arms. I should think *he* looked frightened at such a sight."

"Oh, he didn't look frightened a bit, Mama. He only looked wicked and dreadful. I wish Harry had seen him, and then he would have told you so too, I'm sure."

"Then Harry did *not* see this formidable person?"

"No, Aunt. I was looking round to see if the Mill was going, and I heard Ellie scream out, and saw her tumbling down the bank, and baby too; but I didn't see the man."

"But *you've* seen him, Mama! I'm sure he was that man we saw the first time we went for a walk in the Park after we came to Stockington. Don't you remember how red and fierce he looked? And he spoke to Papa, and you made me and Sarah walk on so very fast. I knew it was because you were afraid of him. And do you know, Mama, I could not help thinking he was something like—"

"Well, Ellie, never mind what you thought *then*. *Now* I want to speak to a *sensible* little girl. Do you think I would willingly expose you to any danger?"

"No, Mama. But you don't know that that man isn't in the rick-yard!" said Ellie, pertinaciously.

"Well, try to-day; and if anything happens to alarm you now, I will promise that henceforth you shall have an escort through the dangers of the rick-yard. What do you think of my sending to the Barracks to request that we may be allowed a couple of sentinels, to be posted at the top of the path? Would that assure you?"

"No, Mama," said Ellie, laughing ; "I'm rather afraid of the soldiers themselves !"

"Oh, you silly child ! Run along, pray ! See how much time you are losing ; and what for ? Just think what for ! Because you are afraid to run a hundred yards,—not alone, either ; for there is that valiant little champion to guard you. Come, Harry, draw your sword, and be ready for a feat of arms in the rick-yard !"

"Mama, now you are making fun of me !"

"And well you deserve it ! Come, run off ; and let the next sight I have of you be through that window."

The children rushed away ; and a grave, anxious expression spread itself over the mother's face, which she dismissed a minute afterwards, as she saw them, flushed and breathless, scrambling down into "the Grotto," and looking towards her for approval.

The week of Harry's stay at Mill Cottage passed quickly away, and the real parting came. It was hard to both—most so to Harry ; for he was more dependent on companionship than Ellie, whose imagination was equal to the effort of peopling "the Grotto," or any other place, in the way that best pleased her inclination at the time. She had little Freddie, too ; and Sarah, who had so won the love of both children, that they now thought nothing perfect unless she were present.

Poor Harry, when he got back to Stockington, wandered about the great house like a little forsaken bird. Maud and David made some learned efforts

to amuse him, and Ruth groped amongst the annals of her youth for subjects of an entertaining kind. But Ruth's stories were not like Sarah's; and Harry could not get on with Maud's geographical games, or David's poetical version of the multiplication-table. The child seemed out of place; and his parents were distressed to see how listless and melancholy he became.

This effect of the return to the town on her companion, helped Ellie's plan for a Saturday meeting materially. The Mamas readily agreed to it for his sake; and either in Castle Place or at Mill Cottage the children were always together awaiting the Farmer's visit. The cottage was, however, the favourite place for these meetings; and the town was avoided whenever any excuse could be pleaded against it.

Moreover, no Saturday passed but Polly's basket was found to contain *something* for the children. A pair of butter swans nestling in fresh water-cresses—a few new-laid eggs—a little loaf marked with their own initials—sometimes a plum-cake—and *always* a bunch of flowers; or, when winter had nipped away every remaining blossom, berries, red and white, and variegated holly, took their place.

Nor were the children wanting, on their part. Mrs. Smith received in her turn brown paper parcels which set geometrical shapes at defiance, and contained offerings the most heterogeneous. It was a great pleasure to her, nevertheless, to open these queer packets; and the Farmer himself would watch the unpacking, and exclaim "Law! there now!" in

tones which told where the young givers stood in his affection, as the odd little attempts to "make something" for him and his wife were displayed to view.

The days now were drawing in rapidly, and the children were told they must begin to make up for lost time at the long-neglected lessons. The occupation, though uncongenial at first, and begun with reluctance on both sides, served to divert their thoughts when meetings were impracticable. The Mamas took care that some fresh "together" should always reward diligence. Lessons were consequently soon regarded in an entirely new light, and decided progress was the result.

Mr. Woodford, though abating nothing of the harshness and reserve of his manner towards Ellie, had learned a salutary lesson from her illness : and, while still she had no experience of a Father's love, she was no longer the object of the ebullitions of temper exhibited in former days.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHRISTMAS was drawing near, when Mr. Tiverton received intelligence that his two sons would spend it at Stockington.

Paul's visits were rare in his home now. Engaged in severe study for his future profession, and the distance of Stockington from London being great, he usually passed his brief seasons of relaxation nearer the scene of his mental labours. Ramsey was still a school-boy, under Paul's surveillance, and in the neighbourhood of London, too. He returned to his family only when his brother was able to accompany him, and, like him, was at other times dependent on more distant relatives for hospitality and amusement.

When, therefore, the Tiverton circle was made complete by the arrival of those truant sons, it was a time of general rejoicing and festivity among them. On the present occasion, the announcement of their coming was quickly followed by an invitation from Mr. and Mrs. Tiverton to their friends in Castle Place and at Mill Cottage, bidding old and young to their family party on Christmas-day. Paul had long ago received an introduction to Percy

Forrester, and their intimacy and regard for each other had grown rapidly. Thus, linked by friendship's chain all round (Mrs. Tiverton's notes argued), the three families *must* spend the most social day of all the year together.

The response from Mill Cottage to this invitation was neither tardy nor reluctant. Even Mr. Woodford gave consent ; and his wife joyfully augured, from the absence of one opposing word on his part, that the unvarying kindness of these friends was gradually subduing his proud and resentful feelings towards them.

Ellie and Harry were to have a fortnight's holiday, and it was to be spent in Castle Place. They had long been concerting plans for amusing themselves in the great nursery during that time. They now looked forward with impatience to the first of those fourteen days when they would be together entirely.

On Christmas-eve—the day when these much-desired holidays were to begin—Ellie's eyes were open before the faintest break of dawn stole into her bed-room, and very impatient she was to hear the sound of Sarah's flint and steel. It came at length ; and with it the little cooing sounds from Sarah's bed, which told that Freddie was awake too, and as pleased as herself to welcome the light.

Harry made his appearance, under Ruth's care, soon after breakfast was ended, and Ellie was to return at once with them to Castle Place.

Kisses, farewells, and exhortations to good conduct over, the children ran down the rough hill-side to-

gether, Ruth following with a note which was to be left at Mr. Tiverton's. The children were (if invited) to go in and see the "boys" (as Paul and Ramsey were called in the family circle), who had arrived from London the day before.

When they reached Mr. Tiverton's house, and Emma heard that Ellie and Harry were with the bearer of the note, she ran down and insisted on their coming up to the drawing-room, where they would see her brothers.

"Just speak to Mama, Ellie," she said (leading both the children into the dining-room), "and then come upstairs." Mrs. Tiverton and her three elder daughters were in this room busily engaged in arranging into bundles a heap of winter clothing which lay before them on the table. "See," Emma continued, after the greetings were over, "all these (pointing to the pile on the table) are for Papa's factory people, and meat and pudding besides downstairs. But let them come with me now, Mama, for I want Paul to see them."

Paul was a pleasant fellow, a favourite everywhere. Ramsey was some years younger, and not, at first sight, as attractive as his brother.

"Well, Ellie, and how are you?" said Paul. "I'm glad to have an introduction. You can't think what an old friend you are. For two years past I have heard more of 'little Ellie Woodford' and her sayings and doings than of anything else in this young lady's letters (touching Emma's shoulder); so you must not be shy with me, you know. What is it? Do you think I'm too big to be spoken to?"

"I thought Emma's brother Paul was a *boy*," said Ellie, blushing and feeling uncomfortable.

"Well, so he was once. But then, you see, boys will grow. Come, we are going to be friends," he added, taking a hand of each child as he spoke. "Harry, who do you think I saw on Monday?—only last Monday?"

"I don't know. Who was it?"

"Some one who is very fond of a little boy who lives at Stockington."

"Is that me?" said Harry.

"Yes."

"And is he fond of Ellie, too?"

"I don't think he knows Ellie," said Paul smiling.

"Was it my brother Percy?"

"It was. I brought a letter from him for Mrs. Forrester. He is a great friend of mine, I'm proud to say. And you may be proud of having such a fine fellow for your brother, Master Harry!"

"I wish he had come to Stockington this Christmas," said Harry. "He has never been here once."

"And I wanted him to come," said Ellie; "I've never seen him. I think he ought to have come to stay with his Papa and Mama at Christmas."

"Ah, you see there was even a stronger attraction in another direction."

Then followed an introduction to Ramsey, who, bent on making the most of his holiday, was full of plans for the festival days which would be included in it. These plans, with Paul's assistance, he contrived to carry out, and thus the presence of the two new friends added greatly to the cheerfulness and merriment of the ensuing fortnight.

But Christmas passed by, as our pleasures here will do, and Ellie found herself opening her eyes again in her bed-room at Mill Cottage, recalling with regret the last time they had opened there, and what had been in prospect then. There was, however, one close by her side who had heard a sigh from the little bed where Ellie lay, and, guessing from it that a contrast unfavourable to present circumstances was being drawn by its occupant, said,—

“What a comfort it is we’ve passed the shortest day, my dear, isn’t it? We shall soon be able to dress by daylight, and then spring and summer and all our pleasantest things will be here in no time. Flower gathering, and Smith’s farm, and everything you and Harry love best!”

The effect of this device was magical. Ellie started up in bed, and all through her dressing was too busy with plans for the summer to remember that she was washing in cold water, and dressing without a fire, on a bleak morning in January.

CHAPTER XIV.

WINTER melted into Spring. The brisk morning walk on the high-road was now exchanged for long afternoon rambles in search of wild flowers. Daily at four o'clock, just as Ellie was folding up her work, repeating snatches of the poetry she had been learning, or chattering away to her mother about the plans for the remainder of the day, Harry, escorted by Ruth, might be seen coming up the hill, that he too might join in the walk and the flower gathering.

The children had made a decided step forward in their studies during the winter months. The Mamas, therefore, readily agreed, both by way of reward and encouragement, that these summer walks should be taken together.

The middle of June was reached, when one afternoon, the weather being too warm for a walk till later in the day, Ellie and Harry, seated in the "grotto," were reading together a new book called "The Yellow Shoe-strings." They were so absorbed in the fortunes of the heroine, that they did not notice a letter being brought into the parlour where Mrs. Woodford was working, or that after reading

it she sat reflecting for some time with a half-amused expression on her face. After a while she tapped at the window, saying, "Come here, you little ones. I've something to tell you."

The book was thrown down ; and after the usual scrambling and the accustomed two or three un-availing efforts, the side of the grotto was scaled, and the "little ones" ran into the parlour.

"I've had a letter from Mr. Stanfield," said Mrs. Woodford as they entered.

"Oh, Mama, is *that* all? We're reading such a delightful book about a little girl who had a pair of red morocco shoes ; and then she bought some——"

"Oh ! well, if you are too much interested in your story to care about mine, run back by all means to your book."

"No, Mama. We do want to hear it if it is something really nice. Only you know everything about Mr. Stanfield seems so *dry* and solemn."

"Well, Ellie, I expect Mr. Stanfield here the week after next. And he intends to stay during the rest of the summer. He wishes to take lodgings near us. But he would like to choose them himself ; and therefore asks me to take him in for a week while he looks about for some."

"*Does* he, Mama ? What shall we do ? He can't bear children. I heard you say so yourself."

"No. Mr. Stanfield is accustomed to a quiet life. I don't know how he would like the games which sometimes go on in this room. But it occurred to me that there is such a place as Smith's farm to which I might send a troublesome little girl."

"Oh, Mama !"—"Oh, Aunt Mary !" (for she

had long ceased to be "Mrs. Woodford" to Harry) "will you really let us go? How very delightful."

"I believe it will be my only resource to send you and Freddie there. Harry must ask his Mama what she thinks of his joining the party. But however this may be, remember it is only for one week."

"Oh, never mind! We shall be glad to have ever such a little bit of time in that dear, sweet place."

"Well, run away now, and talk it over with Sarah. See, there she is, looking into the grotto, and wondering what has become of you."

"How am I to part from that darling for a week?" the Mother added, clapping her hands to attract Freddie's attention, who was bending a searching look into the grotto, where every now and then Sarah was accustomed to carry him, that she might assure herself of the safety of the elder part of her charge. He looked beautiful now, as he raised his eyes and gave his mother an answering smile! The little mousey black hair, which Ellie had thought so ugly when she saw him first, was exchanged for curls, every week becoming thicker and more golden in their hue. The great eyes, which had stared so "frightfully" out upon the strange world when newly opened there, now sparkled with intelligence and mirth; and the "hideous" dark tint of the very young skin was replaced by a complexion quite girlish in its perfect red and white.

"Mama, why is Freddie so pretty, and *me* so ugly?" said Ellie, looking up at her baby brother. "How pretty dear little Willie was, and so is Freddie, and ——"

"And so are *you* pretty, Ellie," said Harry. "I'm sure *I* think you are."

"I'm *not*," said Ellie, in that decisive tone of voice in which she was accustomed to settle every question with her yielding little friend. "But it doesn't matter. Going to Smith's farm, and having everything so delightful, is better than being pretty."

"And being good, and kind, and pleasant, is better than all," said her mother. "Every one looks agreeable when that is the case. So, to make up for personal deficiencies, you had better be doubly attractive in temper and manner."

"I am improving, Mama. Don't you think so?"

"I hope it, Ellie, often. But then," she added, looking tenderly and thoughtfully into Ellie's eyes, "I am not sure about the foundation! And unless *that* is right and true — But I must tell you what I feel on this subject another time. Here comes tea, and Papa will be home directly. Run away, and do not come in till I call you. I shall want a few minutes to speak to him alone."

The mother gazed after her refined-looking child, whose delicately-cut features, fair complexion, and long brown curls were wont to elicit a different verdict amongst general observers from that which Ellie had herself pronounced. But the mother's reflections rested but for a moment on the outward form. Other thoughts stirred her own heart often now. There is a beauty, which she was beginning to value in those she loved, more highly than delicate features or clustering curls. When would such beauty shine within this dear but wayward child?

There proved no difficulty in persuading Mrs.

Forrester to allow Harry to be of the party going to Smith's farm, and "Saturday week" saw the children established there once more, eagerly revisiting every well-remembered spot. The farmer, who had made as early a return from market as possible, walked about after them, carrying Freddie in his arms, delighted to see how the baby "noticed everything," and how well the "little uns" remembered all the old places. Baby took to Farmer Smith at once (as children always did), and would stretch out his arms and make a little sound of joy directly he appeared. Such friends, indeed, did Freddie and the farmer become, that Mrs. Smith was heard to say, "It was well for the business that the visit was only to last a week, for everything would surely go to ruin if her 'master' had the baby there much longer;"—a criticism Mrs. Smith was scarcely in a position to make, since she herself was much more frequently seen with Freddie in her arms than without him, and it was a known fact that even dairy work slackened if Sarah chanced to carry her youngest charge to the door while its mistress was busy there. The farmer told Mrs. Woodford, when he lifted them all out of the cart on their return to Mill Cottage, that there was only one thing he didn't like about their visits to his farm, and that was their going away.

"Mama! what is that large parcel in front of our cupboard?" said Ellie, as she and Harry returned from the grotto, to which they had hastened the moment the first greetings were over.

"Ah, indeed! What is it? I'm sure I can't tell, for I have not opened it."

"How did it come there, Mama? Was it brought

this morning? It's in our way. We can't open our cupboard till it is gone. May Sarah carry it away?"

"It is not my parcel," replied her mother; "so I cannot say what had better be done with it."

"Then whose is it? Mr. Stanfield's, I suppose," Ellie continued, in rather contemptuous accents, walking up to the offending barrier, and giving it a little kick. "Oh!" she exclaimed, in a voice which made baby start, "it's for me! Look, Harry! —'For little Ellie'—see, printed as plainly as can be! Mama, may we open it? How did it come? Has it been here long?"

"How many questions were there in that sentence, Ellie?"

"I don't know, Mama. But do tell me whether you knew it was there, or whether the fairies put it there while you came to see us get out of the cart."

"I did know of its being there. I put it there myself, to await your return. I also know the fairy who brought it. He is a particularly kind fairy, although he does like a quiet life better than a bustling one. He told me that some other fairies, having heard that he was coming, asked him if he would bring some parcels to certain friends they had of 'mortal mould' in Stockington. 'Little Ellie,' it seems, was one of them."

"The first fairy was Mr. Stanfield, I know," said Ellie; "I wonder who the others were!"

"Well, suppose you open that great parcel, and find out. That is an occupation you will not object to, I dare say."

"No, Mama. Indeed I shan't. Only think of its being all for me!"

The parcel was found to contain a number of presents from the relatives in London; and so large an addition to the young people's possessions involved an entire rearrangement of the "corner cupboard"—full occupation for all that afternoon.

"Mama," said Ellie, at dinner, "is Mr. Stanfield going to stay all the summer?"

"Yes, till quite the end of October, I believe."

"Then he will be here at the election. How will he like that, for it will be a great bustle?"

"Where did you hear anything about the election, pray?"

"Oh, Mama, Farmer Smith told us all about it, and about the dreadful things he can remember happening when the people could not have the Member they wanted, or were afraid they should not have him. Whose colours will Papa wear, Mama? We hope it will be Oakes's, because we like those best."

"Why, Ellie, you have become quite a politician! I little thought such things would be included in the list of Smith's farm acquirements. Which colours does Mr. Smith intend wearing?"

"Light blue, Mama, for Oakes, of course. And we are to have the same, Harry and me."

"And are Harry and 'me' to wear light blue, whether their parents adopt those colours or not?"

"Yes, Mama. Oakes is for the right principles, you know—Church and King. That's what Farmer Smith is, and we're going to be the same. Of course, Mama, *you* will be for Church and King. You

wouldn't have anything to do with that frightful dark blue and orange colour, because that belongs to Sir James Sandrock, and nice people always vote for Mr. Oakes. It's all those dirty factory men who want to have Sir James Sandrock."

"Indeed, Ellie! You seem to have formed your opinions and taken your stand on the Tory side in a very decided manner."

"Yes, Mama. That's what Farmer Smith said we were—real, stanch little Tories. And so we are. Sarah said we ought not to talk so, because perhaps our Papas were Whigs. But I don't believe *Dr. Forrester* is a Whig." And Ellie looked musingly out of the window.

"Well, it is early days for you to decide which is the best," said Mrs. Woodford, observing the emphasis on Dr. Forrester's name, and the expression on Ellie's face. "I dare say we shall let you wear the rosette which you prefer when the time comes. But I have something else to talk to you about now. You know that Mr. Stanfield will be often here to tea with us this summer, and that he expects to be quiet always."

"What *shall* we do, Mama? Do think of something for us."

"I have done so. Follow me now, and see what I have to show you."

The children followed Mrs. Woodford into a shed adjoining the back kitchen. There stood a small article of furniture of simplest construction,—just a round board on three legs, whether small table or large stool it was difficult to determine. On it was placed a covered tin can; and from a shelf Mrs.

Woodford took down a basket, in which were two small cups and saucers, and a teapot corresponding in size.

“Oh, Mama! what dear little cups and saucers! Are these for us?”

“Why, I thought this table would be just the size for the grotto, and that we might fill the can with tea, and this basket with bread and butter, and let them down to you, and that you and Harry might have tea together there on bright evenings when Mr. Stanfield is with us.”

“You dear, kind Mama!” exclaimed both the children. “That *is* delightful. You always do think of such pleasant things! And now, Mama, if you please, will you invite Mr. Stanfield directly?”

“He is coming to-morrow, and then you shall have your first tea-drinking in the grotto; and I hope I shall be rewarded by great quietness on *wet* days, when our friend is with us.”

“Yes, Mama. But I don’t want to have one wet day all the summer!”

CHAPTER XV.

As Autumn advanced, the coming election occupied the attention of all parties.

Ellie and Harry were not behind others in political fervour; and the principles expressed in the blue 'favours' were those which they fearlessly announced their intention of upholding.

Mrs. Tiverton invited a large party to witness from her drawing-room the ceremony of chairing the Members when the election was over; the Mill Cottage and Castle Place families being foremost among the invitations. Harry had been staying at the cottage, to be out of the way in case of any commotion in the town during the polling-day; and he, with Mrs. Woodford, Ellie, Sarah, and little Freddie, were to go early to avoid the crowd. They were to spend the whole day at Mrs. Tiverton's, and all, with the exception of Freddie, would remain to see a grand display of fireworks which was to take place in the evening.

Ellie was clad in a new frock, in honour of the day,—delicate, rustling nankeen, made in the latest fashion—the waist shorter, the skirt scantier than any she had ever worn before. Harry complimented her

in private on the effect her toilette produced ; and she, in return, confided to her little friend that, however tastes and fashions might change, it was *her* intention through life to adhere to nankeen, short waists, and scanty skirts.

Harry's dress on the present occasion, was of nankeen also,—a skeleton dress (as it was called), ornamented with gold buttons. A small plaited frill encircled his throat. The habiliments being as nearly like Ellie's as it was possible for a boy's to approach those of a young lady, gave the wearer much satisfaction ; his only regret being, that a like resolve with Ellie's seemed useless for him, for, tax his memory as he would, he could never remember to have seen a full-grown man either habited in nankeen, or wearing a 'skeleton dress.'

By noon the market-place was densely crowded, and every window and parapet surrounding it presented rows and groups of eager faces. Mrs. Tiverton's drawing-room, with its three windows, gave accommodation to a goodly company of ladies and gentlemen, while the bedrooms and parapet were occupied by the friends and acquaintances of the servants.

Ellie and Harry paced about, or stood at the window, inconvenienced, it must be owned, by the badges of loyalty they bore (for they had insisted on having their rosettes made "*very large*"), but as proud as possible that they could show to which side *they* belonged. Their satisfaction reached the culminating point, when, stepping out on the balcony to take a view of the crowd, they saw Farmer Smith just below, and exhibited to his

admiring eyes both the rosettes and the new dresses. As noon struck, the church bells burst forth in a loud and merry peal, the multitude in the market-place began to shout and cheer, and, soon after, the two Members issued from the Town-hall. Each was seated in an arm-chair, gaily adorned with lace, evergreens, and bows of ribbon, and each chair was borne on the shoulders of four men. The Members sat bareheaded, hat in hand, which they waved to the crowd about them, bowing towards windows and balconies as they passed, whence bows were returned and handkerchiefs displayed, amidst vociferous cheering from below, whilst three times the chairs made the circuit of the market-place. The Members then alighted from their triumphal cars, appeared at the great window of the Town-hall, made a short speech, and the ceremony of the day was over.

A bountiful collation was spread in Mr. Tiverton's dining-room, the consuming of which made an agreeable break in the long interval which must elapse before the fireworks would begin. After this banquet was over, the stranger guests left, little Freddie was sent home, and only the especial circle of friends remained to see the fireworks. Time wore away at his old, steady pace, ever the same, though seeming to man so unequal in his progress. Evening was drawing on.

When tea was over, the lights were extinguished, the fire shaded, and the whole party ranged themselves round the windows. Ellie and Harry had low seats given them at that in the centre of the room. But, too excited and expectant to sit, they kept

kneeling or standing with noses flattened against the glass, and eyes strained to catch the first spark that might appear, while the people below were fixing the frames on which the wheels were to be placed. "What time is it? It must be seven o'clock!" were the frequently-repeated questions from the middle window, and Ellie was just beginning a sage observation on the importance of punctuality, when a rushing sound was heard, a rocket darted into the air, and, with a cry of wonder, the children watched its flight up—up—"amongst the stars." Another and another followed, and then came the wheels, which were received with such vigorous applause, that the young people were admonished not to break the windows.

"Well, children, does it equal your expectations?" asked Dr. Forrester, after a while, as he looked on the two eager faces in the light thrown over them by the fireworks.

"Yes, Papa—oh, yes," said Harry. "No, not *quite*, though, Papa. We did not expect they would be at all prettier, but we thought each firework would last longer. Don't you think it does seem a very little while that they last, Papa? The wheels take longer, but when those beautiful rockets go up into the sky it seems all over in a minute, and I do want them to stay sending down that pretty shower of stars. I shall make fireworks, Papa, when I grow up, and then I mean to try if I can't make them last longer. Ellie thinks we shall be able to do it."

"Oh, Ellie is to help, is she? I suppose you will set up a pyrotechnic establishment together?"

"What is that, Papa?"

"A place where fireworks are made."

"I don't think we shall do that, Papa; but we should like to make some pretty ones to let off for you and Mama, and everybody we like, to see. Ellie is so fond of pretty things, and so am I. Don't you think it is very pleasant, Papa, to see pretty th—— Oh! there's a beauty. See, Ellie, see. That is the largest and the best there has been."

"I suppose they are coming towards the end now," said Dr. Forrester. "They have been saving the best till last. That was really a very fine rocket."

A little additional stir went on below, a little more care was exercised in placing a wheel on the frame, as if something especially grand was coming now. Harry began to move from the window, as if impatient of the interval of darkness.

"Don't go, Harry—don't go. There will be another this minute, and you won't see it!"

But Harry fancied that something was going on in a corner of the Market-place which he could see better from another window.

"Come there, Ellie, do. There's no one at that window now. I'm sure they are going to let off something in that corner, and we can't see it here!"

"Nonsense, Harry! This is the best place. Ah! you'll lose the next rocket."

"Wilful people must take their chance," said Mrs. Forrester, making room for Harry to pass.

"Yes, Ellie!" he called out; "I'm sure they have got something there. Do come quick! I can see a spark now."

Ellie darted up. But, in the darkness and her haste, she stumbled over the stool on which Harry had been sitting, and fell forward, knocking her chin with a sounding rap on the ground as she did so.

Considerably hurt by the blow, a little cross, and yet half amused, she was scrambling up, when—

A whizz outside—a crash of glass, succeeded instantly by a piercing scream from the other end of the room—a hissing noise, and a loud explosion—electrified the whole circle.

Amidst a vivid shower of sparks, a blaze suddenly arose in the room—even before the terrified party, hustling each other in the uncertain light, could reach the spot from whence the sounds of distress proceeded. A moment more, and it became clear that Harry's dress was in flames. Dr. Forrester tore off his own coat, and, wrapping it round the child, contrived to extinguish the fire.

As is always the case in moments of distress, the servants seemed double the usual time in giving their aid. All crowded round Harry, entreating him to still his screams if possible, and say where he was hurt.

"My face! My eyes!" was the reply which repeated questionings produced, more than was needed when the lights at last were brought and fell on the object of anxiety.

"Oh, Harry! my own Harry!" burst from Ellie's lips with a cry almost as terrible as his own.

"Hush!" said Dr. Forrester, laying a hand on Ellie's shoulder. Then, kneeling down before his little boy, there followed a half-whispered sentence—"my *poor* child"—in tones which told the

bystanders the effect that that sight produced on the father's mind.

"Do something for him! Make him well!" gasped Ellie, clasping her hands in an agony. "Are you going to let him die without even trying to make him better?" she continued, stamping with impatient terror. "Mama! Mrs. Tiverton! You know something that will do him good!" Then bursting into tears, she was about to dart forward, when her father caught her up in his arms, and, followed by Mrs. Woodford, hurried out of the room into the dining-parlour below, where he left her alone with her mother.

Harry, meanwhile, was lifted into a bedroom, and consigned to Mrs. Forrester's and Mrs. Tiverton's care, while Dr. Forrester went to the surgery for remedies. The rest of the party remained in the drawing-room, listening to every sound, and waiting in anxious impatience for Dr. Forrester's report.

Whether the firework had been thrown wantonly or by accident no one could tell. Mr. Tiverton had hurried out into the market-place (while the rest were crowding round Harry) with the intent to find out who was the author of the accident. But in the excitement attending the discharge of the last firework—the grandest of all—he could get no information. Some fancied they had heard the crash of a breaking window, but could not tell who had been the cause of it. Others said the mischief was likely to have been done by a man who had been disorderly all the evening. But who this person was, or what had become of him now, no one seemed to know.

The case which had contained the firework was

found close to the place where Harry had been standing, and the pane of glass must have been shattered by it directly in his face.

It was long before Dr. Forrester came out of the bedroom. When at last he did join those who were waiting so anxiously for his opinion, all were struck by the forced calmness of his manner and the brevity of his replies.

"We shall see in a few days—the suffering now is intense."

No more than this was volunteered. No further questioning was obtruded.

Mrs. Woodford ran up from the dining-room on hearing the Doctor's footstep. To her he said,—

"Do the best you can with Ellie. She must go home. Remind her how good and patient the dear boy was for so many weeks when she was ill. I have now to arrange with Mrs. Tiverton for getting him home, which I wish to do directly the crowd has dispersed."

Ellie had gradually become calm under her mother's influence. But it was with some difficulty that she was persuaded quietly to give up the hope of seeing Harry. She had, more than once, to be reminded of the example he had set her by his conduct eighteen months ago, before she would yield patiently to this apparently severe restriction. And then not knowing whether most to indulge hope or to look forward to something more terrible still than had yet occurred, she took her mother's offered hand, and they returned to Mill Cottage.

Harry was wrapped carefully in blankets,—the

poor face ingeniously protected, in its sensitive suffering, from pressure and from cold, by Mrs. Tiverton's skilful hand,—and was borne through the now silent town, over the very path his own young feet had gaily trodden scarce twelve hours before!

CHAPTER XVI.

MANY days of alternating hope and fear succeeded that on which the accident occurred. Dr. Forrester had from the first foreboded that such injuries to a part so sensitive as the eye could be productive of but one result. Soon all doubt was over. Harry's loving spirit was never again to shine out through those once clear and truthful eyes. Mirth or sorrow, cloud or sunshine, would never dim or brighten them again. Gradually the pains lessened, and the wounds healed. The curls, so singed and marred, regained their beauty, and it was hoped that time would smooth the seams about the face which those cruel cuts and burns had made. But henceforth all sights of beauty, all joys that loving looks and household faces can impart, were to be closed and dead to him.

From day to day Harry had gone on bearing his pain manfully. His health had been much shaken by the shock his nervous system had sustained, and Dr. Forrester would not suffer any suspicion of his permanent loss of sight to be excited in his mind till his general health should be perfectly restored. To insure this, the truth had been carefully concealed from Ellie. She imagined every day, when she went

down to see her little friend, that she should hear the blindness had passed off in the night. Harry was getting cheerful again now, and looked more like himself than in those first dreadful days when Ellie had been cautiously admitted to his darkened room. She therefore concluded that all trouble was departing, and did not scruple to tell Sarah in private that she thought everybody was behaving very strangely. Instead of seeming pleased that Harry was getting better, they all looked as dismal as could be. And she thought it was a good thing that Harry could *not* see ; for if he could, of course he would suppose they were not glad he was getting well.

But it is necessary here to return to the day which succeeded the catastrophe. Mrs. Tiverton had been up with Harry all night, and had only returned from the sick-room in time for dinner. (Mrs. Woodford had engaged to take her place in the afternoon for the remainder of that day, and for the night also if needful.)

On her way to Dr. Forrester's, she looked in at Mrs. Tiverton's to ascertain her opinion of the child's condition when she had left him. Mrs. Woodford listened to the account of the night, and of the pain so bravely borne by the little boy, and she and Mrs. Tiverton were recalling to each other the panic of that moment when the crash came, followed by Harry's scream, when Mrs. Tiverton said,—

“Have you heard that it is supposed the mischief was done by an insane person ? ”

“Indeed ; no. I have heard nothing about it.”

"There was some man (a stranger it seems) in the market-place, who was very disorderly, and kept throwing about fireworks in a dangerous manner. One of Mr. Tiverton's warehousemen fancies he has traced the throwing of the fatal one (which it appears was abstracted from those about to be exhibited) to this person. No one yet seems to know who he was. However, my husband intends making a careful inquiry. For if it should turn out that this man is mad, he ought to be looked after."

Mrs. Tiverton remarked that a strange expression passed over Mrs. Woodford's face at the beginning of the account she was giving. Before its conclusion, that expression was exchanged for blushes so deep and painful, that the good lady, between the perplexity she felt at this extraordinary effect of her story, and her desire to remove it, could not summon a single idea to her mind or word to her lips, and, forsaken of her self-possession, silently blushed herself in sympathy.

Mrs. Woodford recovered first, and, assuming an air of indifference, said that perhaps the kindest part towards everyone was to let the matter drop. No knowledge of who the delinquent was would benefit poor Harry; and if it were found out, there must always exist a painful feeling with regard to the individual who had done it, however innocent in intention he might have been.

With this speech, more hurriedly spoken than was usual with her, Mrs. Woodford rose to leave, saying she should be expected at Dr. Forrester's. The Tiverton door was no sooner closed upon her than

she hurried to the counting-house, where she inquired at once for her husband. They remained engaged in earnest discussion for a few moments, and then Mrs. Woodford hastened away to Dr. Forrester's.

One afternoon, some two months after the fatal chairing day, Harry was sitting on the sofa by his father, who was telling him a story of his own childish days, when at its conclusion Harry said suddenly,—

"Papa, what is the reason I don't begin to see? Ain't I quite well now?"

His father took a little hand in one of his, and with the other smoothed the child's cheek.

"I shall be so glad to see again, Papa. Have I been as patient as you could wish about being blind so long, and having this bad face?"

"Quite, my precious child!" replied his father with almost a groan.

"Oh! don't be sorry about it now, dear Papa. All the pain is gone, and my face is well. And when my seeing comes back, it will all be right again, won't it?"

No reply.

"Papa, why don't you answer me? What are you thinking about? Is anything the matter?"

"Harry, my boy! you have been as dear and patient a child as parents could desire to have; and suppose, now, it were necessary for that patience to last *much* longer, do you think you could command it? Is there enough in that young spirit of yours to last a long, long while?"

"What do you mean, Papa?"

"I mean, my poor boy, could you bear to be

without sight for a much longer time than you have yet been ?”

“Papa!” said the child, in a frightened tone. “Oh ! Papa, how long ?”

“Suppose, dear, *dear* boy, it were to be *always* so, would you try to bear that sore affliction as you have borne the pain of the last two months ?”

It was now Harry’s turn to remain silent. His father felt him tremble, and drew his child towards him, while he vainly tried to command his voice and speak some cheering words.

“Not any more, Papa ?” said Harry, after a long interval of agitated silence. “Shall I never see anything pretty again ? Will it always be dark like this as long as I live ? No more walks with Ellie to gather flowers, and no happy games ever any more ? I can’t even read, or walk about by myself ! Papa, wouldn’t it have been better if I had died ?”

“Harry, Harry, *don’t !*” said his father, now weeping unrestrainedly. “Will you not be tenfold more precious to us all than you have ever been ? Will it not be our thought every day how we can lighten this heavy trouble, and make life happy to our darling boy ? Think of Ellie, and your mother. Would *they* have thought it better for you to die ?”

“No, Papa. I don’t know what Ellie would have done. But perhaps she won’t like me now I’m going to be blind always.”

“I’m not afraid on that point, my boy. Ellie will love her little brother more than ever. She will want to be always with him, that no one may lead him about, and read to him, but herself.”

“Will she, Papa ?”—a flush of joy passing over

the little scarred face—"do you *know* she will? Have you told her I shall never be able to see any more?"

"No, she knows nothing about it yet. But I will venture to speak for her now. Harry, it has been one of my greatest comforts in this heavy trial that you have this dear little companion. And we are all resolved that no needless restriction shall be put on your being together as much as you desire."

"Dear, kind Papa! I will be patient."

"I am sure of it, my boy. We have had good proof that we might hope for your enduring bravely."

"Are you going to be busy now directly, Papa?"

"No; I was intending to stay here and try to amuse you this afternoon."

"Thank you, dear Papa. Does it rain?"

"No, it is a fine, mild day. Tell me what you are thinking of? Is there anything you would like me to do?"

"Yes, Papa. Please to go up and tell Ellie I shall never see any more, and come back and tell me if she *will* have me for her little brother still. Will you please to go now, and may I stay by myself till you come back? I will lie still on the sofa all the time."

"I must be gone an hour, at least, Harry. That is too long for you to be alone."

"Well then, Papa, may Ruth come and sit in the room, and not speak to me?"

"Do I understand that my boy would rather *no one* spoke to him about what he has just heard?"

"Yes, Papa. I want to *think* how it will be

always to be in the dark, and I don't want any one to talk about it."

"You shall have your wish, and I will go on your errand to Ellie at once."

After a hasty interview with his wife, Dr. Forrester set off on his mission, and arrived at Mill Cottage just as the brief daylight had faded. Ellie was dancing about the room with Freddie, lighted partly by the blazing fire, and partly by a brilliant moon which was shining in at the yet unshuttered window. Mrs. Woodford sat watching the children, and occasionally joining in their game.

"Dr. Forrester!" she exclaimed, starting up as he entered the room. "There is nothing the matter, I hope."

"No, nothing the matter, thank you."

"How is my Harry?" inquired Ellie, taking Dr. Forrester's hand with a familiarity she would not have dared to show towards her own father.

"*Your* Harry is, I think, quite well. He has sent me with a message to you. Can you suspend your game while I give it? I can only stay a few minutes, and he waits for your reply."

"Oh, Dr. Forrester! As if I should care one bit about a game with Freddie when you have something to tell me about Harry. There, go along, baby! Play is over now!" And, shutting the door after her mother, who carried Freddie away, Ellie ran back to Dr. Forrester's side.

There was an expression on his face which made Ellie stay the joyous inquiry her lips had formed; and, changing her tone, she asked in a quiet voice—

"Has Harry sent to tell me he can see?"

A momentary silence followed.

"No, Ellie, not that. He has sent you a message though, and an inquiry."

"Will you please to tell me what it is?" said Ellie, beginning to get frightened.

"I will. Ellie, you have had great pleasure in playing with my boy for the last two years, have you not?"

"Oh! yes. But don't say 'my boy,' Dr. Forrester; say 'with your little brother Harry.'"

"Well. It has been very pleasant to run about the fields, and gather flowers, and play in the grotto with 'your little brother Harry,' has it not?"

"Yes, *anything* is pleasant when Harry and I are together."

"How would you like, Ellie, to change, and have another companion?"

"I wouldn't—I won't—you *shan't* take him away!" exclaimed Ellie, all her natural impetuosity bursting forth without an attempt at self-control.

"Stop, Ellie, stop! I have no such thought. But suppose Harry himself in some things were changed, and, instead of being able to run about and play with you, he were always henceforth to need care and watching, and to be dependent on you and others for every pleasure as well as for everything new his mind could receive. Is his little 'sister' so faithful and so loving that she could give up her sport sometimes to sit by Harry's side, and read to him, and tell him tales, and strive to lighten this changed life to him?"

"Is my Harry going to be ill all his life long?"

and tears gathered in the eyes which had been so intently fixed upon Dr. Forrester's face.

"Not ill, I trust. Dear boy! His health seems restored now. But, Ellie, a great sorrow has fallen on us. Your little brother is *blind*."

"For always? Is he never going to see any more?"

"Never again. The little hope we had for a few days after the accident has long been extinguished. We have known for many weeks past that my boy's blue eyes would never smile on us again; and we have been trying to forget our own sorrow in plans for his relief—how we could cheer and lighten life to him. And Ellie, do you know that on *you*, our little friend of ten years old, our greatest hope for doing this has been fixed? I have come to ask you now if you will help us, and strive to bring some light into this grievous darkness which has fallen on our sweet, merry boy."

In stunned silence Ellie listened to the fatal news. The tears which had begun to flow at the thought of Harry a constant invalid were arrested by a strange and stricken feeling, as the picture of Harry blind for life was first presented to her mind. But when she heard his father tell that in their grief his parents' thoughts had turned to her as the chief source of help, a strange conflict took place in her young, impetuous heart. Sorrow, pity, pride, delight, hasty resolves to be what child had never been before—so prudent, loving, and so wise—chased each other in hurried succession there.

"May I? Will you let me? Oh, Dr. Forrester, I will try—I will try!" And she clung round his

neck in one of those passionate fits of weeping, which, being the outbursting of an inward tempest, always quieted and relieved her.

Dr. Forrester knew her temperament, and waited till the cloud had exhausted itself. When the sobbing was somewhat checked, he said,—

“I have not told you either the message or the inquiry I came to bring. Would you like to hear both, just as I received them?”

“Oh yes! I had forgotten about that. Do tell me! Dear, dear little Harry!”

“I told him the mournful news I have been telling you. He never knew till this afternoon that his sight was gone for ever. His first thought seemed to be of you, and he said, ‘Please to go up and tell Ellie I shall never see any more; and come back and bring me word if she will have me for her little brother still.’”

Ellie’s lip trembled; but she struggled against the returning tears, and said, in a voice she strove should be composed,—

“Dr. Forrester, may I go back with you and tell Harry myself that I shall love him a great deal *better* than I did, and that I don’t want ever to do anything again but to take care of him, and try to make him happy?”

Dr. Forrester gave her a kind, sad smile, as he looked down on her eager face, and, patting her cheek, he said,—

“Go and see if Mama will let me have a word with her.”

Ellie darted away, and found her mother seated with Freddie on her lap, in the room which combined

nursery and sleeping-room for Sarah and the children. She delivered her message, and when Mrs. Woodford had left the room, she put her arms round Sarah's neck, and, resting her hot cheek against the maid's, said,—

“ Sarah, do you know all about it, about my Harry ? ”

“ Ah, yes, my dear, indeed I do ! It's a sad, bitter trouble. But oh, Miss Ellie, what a comfort you may be to him and to every one now, if you are only thoughtful, and try to keep down your temper ! Why you may be almost light and eyesight to that dear little boy, if you are a good, gentle child ! ”

“ Oh, Sarah, I do want to try ! What *can* I do to make myself patient and good ? ”

Sarah knew full well the one only way that must be taken to lead to such a result. It was an old road—one that she had often pointed to before ; and she was thinking how she should now set forth once more the importance of entering on it, when Mrs. Woodford called out from below,—

“ Sarah, be so good as to dress Miss Ellie for walking as quickly as you can. She is going with Dr. Forrester, and he is in haste.”

A few moments sufficed to make the needful preparations ; and, as Sarah kissed Ellie at parting, she whispered,—

“ It is the ‘ new heart,’ the ‘ right spirit,’ you need, dear child. Trying is of no use without that. Ask for it again, my dear, and so will I for you.”

Dr. Forrester suffered Ellie to walk in silence the whole distance till they reached his door. Here she

hurriedly pulled the hand that held hers, and drew back a little as if afraid to enter.

"You will try to be composed, Ellie, like a little woman, you know," said Dr. Forrester. "I should be sorry for poor Harry to be needlessly agitated."

"Yes. Stop a minute, please. Don't let me go home again *to-night*, will you, Dr. Forrester?"

"Certainly not. I have your mother's permission for you to pay us a long visit."

"Have you? May I tell Harry that?"

"Yes. I wish you to do so when you please."

The door was opened; and with a trembling, noiseless step, Ellie followed Dr. Forrester's rapid strides into the room, where Harry, in fulfilment of his promise, was lying on the sofa, waiting his father's return. Ruth was seated near him at her work.

"Papa, what does she say?" he asked, starting up as his father and Ellie entered the room.

"Harry! my darling little brother!" cried Ellie, darting across to him, and throwing her arms round him; "I've come to stay with you and take care of you, all myself. And I'm going to try never to be cross and impatient any more. You needn't be unhappy, dear, because I will read to you, and tell you stories, and describe things to you, so that you shall almost see them, Harry! And all I can possibly think of I'll do to please and comfort you."

The voice had been getting thicker from the moment Ellie said "he need not be unhappy;" and now she stopped abruptly, lest it should betray the

fact that tears were accompanying her meant-to-be cheerful words ; forgetful that they were falling on Harry's cheek and brow.

"Ellie dear, don't cry!" he said, clasping her fast. "I'm sure I shall not be unhappy if you will be my sister still. I only was afraid you wouldn't like to stay with me much, now I can't see, because all our play is over, you know. Oh, Ellie! think of my being blind always!—never seeing a single pretty thing again!"

"We won't talk of it now, my boy," said Dr. Forrester, walking up to the sofa. "Besides, here is Ellie come to stay for so long that she must go up and get herself properly established in her own room, and see if Mama has provided her sufficient space for her wardrobe, which will be here presently, and then it will be tea-time. So let Ellie run off now, and I will stay with you while she is gone."

CHAPTER XVII.

ELLIE now devoted herself with characteristic energy to the task she had undertaken. It was she who led Harry to his place at meals, and gave him all he wanted; she who sat beside him hour after hour reading to him, or telling him wondrous tales of her own invention. Her hand held his as they took the air together, and many an expedient her fertile brain suggested for pleasing and interesting her 'little brother.' But it was a sad time, and, do what she might, it would not be cheated into cheerfulness.

Poor Harry, though always contented when Ellie was near, was often heard to sigh mournfully—a symptom of his inward sense of privation the more touching from its never being expressed in words. The parents heard, and looked on with aching hearts, and Ellie often sighed in concert with Harry.

This state of things had gone on for some weeks. Nothing was said about Ellie's return home. Mrs. Forrester gave a daily portion of her time to her lessons, and Harry sat by listening; but he never asked, nor was it ever suggested, that he should join in the studies.

Ellie's always pale face began to assume that wan and anxious expression which had not been seen on it since her first visit to Smith's Farm. She appeared languid, and her attempts at cheerfulness were forced and unnatural. All this was quickly noted by Dr. and Mrs. Forrester, and became a new source of anxiety. If Ellie's health were interrupted, she must return home ; and then what could be done for Harry's amusement—for the poor dependent little boy ?

It was the middle of February—a wet, cheerless day. After dinner the children established themselves by the nursery fireside, to get through the dull afternoon as best they might. The wind came in gusts, driving the rain against the windows with a dreary sound, and all distant prospect was hidden by the fog.

Ellie took the last new book and read for a while ; Harry's head resting on her shoulder, and their arms encircling each other. Before long she ceased reading, and, as if by mutual consent, she and her companion sat in silence. This lasted for so long that Ruth, who was standing near the window to catch the quickly-dying daylight for her work, looked round more than once, wondering at the stillness. At length Ellie exclaimed, with a suddenness and vehemence that made both Ruth and Harry start,—

“Harry, I've thought of something ! Oh, the most delightful plan ! but—” she whispered, checking herself, “I'll tell you, dear, when Ruth's gone. She'll go presently for a candle.”

Harry had not long to wait. The clouds grew darker, and even before the clock on the landing

below chimed out four, Ruth declared she must 'go after a candle,' though she wouldn't be sure that the work she should do would pay for one, for she had a dreadful headache.

"Oh, Ruth," said Ellie, "I want to tell Harry something; and if you will go down and get some tea, to do your head good, I will take the greatest care of him till you come back."

"Then, Miss Ellie, you must promise that you won't go poking the fire, and that you won't stand up on the guard to get anything off the mantel-shelf, as you're so fond of doing. I daresay a cup of tea *will* do me good, and I'm sure I'm very glad to hear you *have* got something to tell Master Harry, for you've been so unusual quiet that I thought something ailed you both."

"I won't touch anything, Ruth, or poke the fire, or do one single thing you don't like; so do stay, and have as much tea as ever you want."

"That's two words for yourself and one for me, I expect, Miss Ellie? Now, be good children, and be sure to ring if you want anything."

Tea was ready in the parlour. The Doctor returned, and the family assembled there, only the younger children being absent. More than once Ruth had been up to the nursery to stir the fire and see how they were getting on. She could hear Ellie's tongue rattling away (as it used of old, but as it had not done since the fatal charring day) when she came to the door; but as soon as she entered the room it ceased. Each time she found Harry sitting with his face bent towards Ellie in an attitude of eager attention, and observed that he seemed as

desirous as his companion that they should be left to themselves. Ruth, therefore, returned to her chat in the kitchen, and her cup of tea, with an easy conscience ; and the children had the great room to themselves. Now, however, the maid appeared with a summons to the parlour, and she lighted them downstairs. On the landing they stopped for a moment. Ellie whispered something into Harry's ear, and they both burst into one of the old ringing peals of laughter. The dining-parlour door was open, and the long unwonted sounds met the ears of the circle there. Every eye was overflowing in a moment, and there was some difficulty in getting composed by the time the children (still full of their joke) seated themselves at the tea-table ; Ellie with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, and Harry's pretty, good-tempered mouth stretched into a merry smile.

"Well, little folks," said Mrs. Forrester (without remarking on the unusual signs of mirth), "how have you been amusing yourselves this dreary afternoon ?"

"It hasn't been dreary, Mrs. Forrester. We have been *so* happy ; haven't we, Harry ? Ruth has had a very bad headache."

"I hope *that* is not what has made you so happy !" said Dr. Forrester, smiling.

"No, Papa. Only she went downstairs to have some tea to do it good, and then Ellie could talk to me, you know."

Again they both smiled, and Ellie looked important.

When tea was over, and its removal caused a

little bustle in the room, she ran up to Dr. Forrester, and whispered,—

“Are you going away? Because we want to speak to you.”

“I have no pressing call on my time for the next hour. I can hear what my little ones have to say to me,” he replied, kindly strcking her hair. “Is it to be a secret? You will have full opportunity, it seems, for telling it; for there is Mama taking her candle, and Maud and David have already escaped.”

“I’m so glad. That is just what we wanted,” said Ellie.

“Well, come! There goes the urn. All is cleared now. Harry shall sit on my knee; and Ellie, you bring a chair to this side. Now, who begins?”

“Ellie must begin, Papa, because it’s her plan, and she is the eldest. Such a nice plan, Papa! I hope you will like it.”

“I shall certainly try to like it, my boy, if it pleases you. Now, Ellie, let me hear it.”

“Why, Dr. Forrester, you know that Harry and I were always so happy together at Mill Cottage. We like the country best, and then we like being with Sarah; we love her so much—better than we do Ruth. She always amuses us so nicely!”

“Yes, Papa, she does. And I know she could teach me how to plait again, as we used at Smith’s Farm, and to knit, too. Blind people *do* knit and plait, Papa,” he said, raising the poor little face intreatingly; “and I want to do my lessons with Ellie. She says she will teach me them, and then I can say them to Aunt Mary. And we can play with

Freddie, too. Ellie says there are several games she is sure I could play at without being hurt; and then, you know, Papa, when the spring comes we can *sit* in the grotto."

"My poor little ones have found this great house in the town very dull; have they not?"

"We like Mill Cottage better, Papa. But is it wrong of me to wish to go? I do love you and Mama, and David and Maud, too."

"I am sure of that, my boy. And don't think I mean to check your plan, when I remind you how little room 'Aunt Mary' has at Mill Cottage, and that Freddie wants nearly all Sarah's time now."

"Oh, Dr. Forrester!" said Ellie, "I'm sure Mama could make room. Mama can manage everything, and I'll tell you what Harry and I planned this afternoon. If Mama would have *Rachel* to stay always, then she could be Freddie's nurse, and we could have Sarah all to ourselves, to dress Harry and everything. You know Rachel did take care of Freddie when we were at Smith's farm."

"There, Papa! Isn't that nice? Don't you think Ellie is clever at making plans. I hope Aunt Mary will consent."

"But you don't mean to go away, and quite leave your Papa and Mama, my boy, do you?"

"No, Papa. I shall come down every day to see you, and come home to stay, too, sometimes. It will be the same as Ellie's coming here. I shall be on a visit, you know."

"Mrs. Woodford has been so kind as to ask several

times that you might go to Mill Cottage for change. But I don't know how I could propose to her a prolonged visit of the kind you suggest."

"But leave it in our hands," continued Dr. Forrester. "Mama and I will talk it over, and if we can all combine together to fall in with your wishes, we shall be very glad to do so. I am sure I may speak for 'Aunt Mary' as well as for Mama and myself. She has been a kind friend to my little boy. Hasn't she, Harry?"

"Yes, Papa, that she has. And she's so cheerful, we all used to have such fun together sometimes when Mr. Woodford was out, such merry games, Papa, you cannot think. And Ellie says she is sure they needn't be quite over, though I am blind."

Dr. Forrester was at no loss to understand why Mill Cottage possessed so many charms for the children. The spirit of the house, when the master was absent, was cheerfulness. His own home, though congenial to himself, he felt must often be wearying to them; and he reproached himself for having allowed so many weeks to pass without realizing that its grave monotony was having an injurious effect both on Harry's own spirits and on those also of his zealous companion. Long and deliberately he thought over the subject the children had introduced, and then sought out his wife, with whom he again went over the same ground; and reverted to a plan of theirs abandoned as impracticable before, but to be entertained again now as a possibility. They came at last to the decision that they would go together the following morning and discuss the matter freely with Mrs. Woodford.

Noon the next day saw them in the parlour at Mill Cottage, where, having related the children's conversation and the happy effect that Ellie's idea had had on both, they frankly told their friend how that long ago they had wished Harry could join Ellie's studies, and be entirely under Mrs. Woodford's care, but that circumstances had continued to prevent their suggesting it, till at last the thought had been reluctantly given up. Now, however, if she could consent to undertake the charge, the parents both felt that such a plan would conduce more to their little boy's happiness than any other they could devise.

Without hesitation Mrs. Woodford gave her consent.

"You think, Mary, your husband will not object?" said Mrs. Forrester.

"I am certain he will not. In this instance I am sure I may speak positively on that point; he would object to nothing in which we could help you with poor Harry. The only fear I have is about house-room. But we must see if Mrs. Simpson can make any further arrangement in our favour."

"Well," said the Doctor, as he and his wife walked home together, "whatever Mr. Woodford's defects may be, we have found him a kind friend in this affliction of our poor child's; and now you see his wife does not appear to have any doubt of his consent to this arrangement."

"No, I could see she had none. How often people turn out better than we supposed them to be! Mr. Woodford has been an emphatic instance of this in our time of sorrow."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. WOODFORD assented without hesitation to Harry's becoming an inmate at Mill Cottage. Mrs. Simpson also did her best to aid the plan by giving up a little room (now used for lumber) for his use. This was all that was wanted. The preparations went on briskly, and before long the children were established at the cottage happy as uncaged birds.

The winter had been long and severe. It was the end of March before even the gooseberry-bushes put forth their young buds ; and none but the hardiest of spring flowers had anything to do with that month at all this year. While boisterous winds still howled, and snow-storms continued to fall, Mr. Stanfield wrote to announce that early in April he should permanently return to Stockington. The cause for this migration could at first only be guessed at. All remained mystery, till one evening Miss Tiverton walked up to the cottage and told Mrs. Woodford that she and Mr. Stanfield were too old for "weddingizing," but that he would meet her and her parents and sisters at St. Peter's Church next morning ; that a postchaise would take two of the party

quietly away from the church door, and that in three or four weeks' time they hoped to settle into their cottage in the park, where they should wish to see all their old friends without any ceremony.

Some days after this interview, when the wonder was growing old, when the great wedge of wedding-cake had been tasted sundry times, and the name of "Mrs. Frederick Stanfield" had been read over till the strange sound and association were growing familiar, there came a hopelessly wet afternoon. The rain streamed down from a brown unbroken mass of clouds, and no one, not compelled to do so, thought of going out of doors. Lessons were over, and Mrs. Woodford was trying to vary the children's amusement by singing to them, and playing Scotch airs and rattling country dances. Freddie, under Ellie's direction, was curvetting about, making little dangerous experiments at doing something dexterous with his feet, meant for dancing, to Ellie's delight and his mother's amusement, who gave Harry from time to time a whispered description of his proceedings, when a loud, impatient knock sounded, and a moment after Mr. Woodford was heard divesting himself of his great-coat in the outer room. Mrs. Woodford ran to the door to ascertain the cause of his unusually early return.

"Home in good time to-day, you see, Polly," he said, as she opened it. "Well, little ones, having a game, eh? How's my bird?" (Taking up Freddie and kissing him.) "Here, Ellie (giving her a kind pat on the shoulder), you must take them both up to Sarah, for I want to speak to your mother. I wonder when you and Harry would like to go and

spend a day at Smith's farm, and have a row on the river? "

In silent wonder Ellie stared up at her father without attempting to move. It was his habit to come home from town in no genial temper, and his wife always contrived that the two elder children should be out of the way if possible, or so occupied apart that they should be little observed till rest, refreshment, and her influence had smoothed the roughness which contact with the outer world always increased. Her father's manner now, therefore, held Ellie in half-stupified astonishment.

"Ellie, you look bewildered!" said her mother, laughing. "Do you understand that Papa has something to say to me, and wishes you all to go upstairs? There, take Harry's hand, and let baby scramble up before you."

"More dance," said Freddie, in a determined voice, when he found he was about to be sent away, and planting himself before Ellie with frock prepared.

"Not more dance now, darling," said his mother; "run upstairs with Ellie, and see the white mice."

The white mice were pets of the elder children, a birthday present from Harry to his "sister;" and Freddie's excitement, when allowed to see them, made it a treat not often bestowed. He therefore yielded the dancing point with a good grace, allowed Ellie to lead him away, and the parents were left to their private communications.

More than half an hour passed before the sitting-room door again opened, and then Mrs. Woodford came running up to the nursery.

"Oh, Mama!" exclaimed Ellie, as her mother entered the room, "how pretty you look!"

"Do I, Ellie? I am much obliged to you for the compliment."

"But, Mama! what makes you look so happy? Your eyes sparkle so, and you have such rosy cheeks."

"Well, for one thing, I'm pleased because Papa is at home so early this evening."

Ellie tossed her head scornfully.

"Ellie, Ellie! I shall neither look pleased nor happy, if I see such an expression as that on my little girl's face."

"I won't, Mama," said Ellie, penitently, for she had caught Sarah's gentle eye looking down on her in grave reproof.

"I came up to tell you that Papa wishes to have tea alone with me to-night, and that you may all have yours with Sarah upstairs. I dare say, if you coax her, she will let you have the small tea-things, and make for yourselves. Be sure and act liberally to the little dancer; he must want refreshment after his exertions."

"Mice!" said Freddie, running up to his mother—the word "dance" having now an association in his mind with the often-denied treat of seeing the little prisoners.

"Yes, pretty little white mice! Did Freddie see them?"

"See mice—more see mice," repeated the little one, trying to pull his mother towards the place where they were kept.

"No, Mama, he must *not* see them again. He

frightens the poor little things nearly to death, and he's *so* naughty when they are put away."

"Not naughty now. No one must be naughty *to-day*," said his mother, catching up her darling, and bestowing a prolonged kiss upon the little white throat, upon which Master Freddie began to play with his mother's brooch, pricked his fingers, and, by way of consolation, was carried downstairs to his father. And, for the time, the white mice were forgotten.

It was not without cause that the mother's eyes sparkled, and her cheek was flushed. Her husband had brought home tidings which might well excite joyful and thankful feelings in her heart, and write their story in her face.

Several weeks before the afternoon of which we write, a vacancy had occurred in a post of trust and importance in the firm of Musgrave and Tiverton. Mr. Woodford ably fulfilled some of its most important duties in this emergency, and received Mr. Tiverton's warm acknowledgment of his helpful service. Mr. Tiverton's own opinion led him to wish Mr. Woodford's instalment into the vacant office. He had, however, little expectation (though he wrote to propose it) of obtaining a like decision from Mr. Musgrave, who still looked on Mr. Woodford with distrust, and exercised the closest scrutiny into all his business movements.

It was, therefore, with surprise that Mr. Tiverton had that day received a communication from his partner, saying that he had been induced to acquiesce in his wish on the subject, and that Mr. Tiverton

now had his consent to the vacant post being filled by Mr. Woodford.

This was not a decision which the kind old gentleman was likely to be slow in communicating to the person most interested. He rejoiced in the hope that the bitter fruit of early indiscretion had done its useful work. And though there was yet much to repel in Mr. Woodford's manner, his considerate friend made large allowance for a disappointed and suspected man. Of his business capabilities there could be no distrust. And, if he only went on steadily now, there might yet be respect and prosperity in store for him.

"So, Mary, there's another start in life for me, you see. More than I ever expected!" said Mr. Woodford, at the close of a prolonged and earnest *tête-à-tête*.

"Not more than *I* expected, George. I felt sure things would mend in time. At least, I began to have hope directly I came to Stockington, and saw what Mr. Tiverton was. I knew he must find out that all he had suspected could not be true; but there must be a drawback to everything here, and I suppose the shadow over this blessing will be that I shall have much less of your society at home now."

"Yes, I shall be often away. But, with such a houseful of children, you won't miss me much."

"Shall I not?" said his wife, tenderly. "*I* arrive at a different opinion. But I am thankful that I shall have so much to occupy me."

Many years passed by before the Woodfords knew that it was to Mr. Stanfield's patient zeal in their behalf that they owed this happy turn in their

fortunes. They learned then that it was he who had pleaded his friend's cause with Mr. Musgrave, unwearied by repeated refusal; that it was Mr. Stanfield who, when the vacancy came accidentally to his knowledge, had not lost an hour in once more urging the oft-repeated plea, and had at last prevailed. They knew full well they had in him a warm as well as a helpful friend; but they little guessed that it was he who brought relief and comfort to them now.

As many inconveniences arose to the Woodford family from the confined space allotted them in Mill Cottage, the first thing to be thought of with improving fortune was a change of residence. Many weeks, therefore, did not pass by after that wet afternoon in May when such joyful tidings had been brought to the cottage, before the subject was discussed with practical intentions.

It was not only Ellie who had indulged pleasant dreams of a village home in Wilton. Her mother had often thought of the picturesque old house there, with longing to make it her future abode. Besides this wish on Mrs. Woodford's part, the spacious house and gardens offered many advantages for her family now that it was increased by Harry's presence. Nor were space and freedom the only important considerations with respect to it. Lying so much "out of the way," Wilton was unsought for as a place of residence by the busy people of Stockington, and, consequently, the great house there stood low in the market. The change might therefore be made without anxiety in point of expense.

When so much was to be said in favour of so

pleasant a dwelling-place, all hesitation was quickly at an end, and it was decided that, as soon as needful repairs and decorations could be completed, the Woodfords should exchange Mill Cottage for Wilton Manor-house.

Ellie was wild with delight when the plan was made known to her. And, when she further understood that Harry was to form one of the Wilton family circle, she declared herself quite certain that perfect happiness was now in store for her.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was with a glad and thankful heart that Ellie's mother began to prepare the Manor-house at Wilton as her future home.

The quiet beauty of this spot, its deep seclusion, and its little band of rustic neighbours, were all in unison with her tastes and wishes. Some spoke of its being dull ; but the mistress herself had no such fear. The children would, she felt, be a constant resource in her husband's absence, and she had long been learning to draw peace and joy from a source not likely to fail her in quiet and retirement.

The old Manor-house at Wilton now occupied most of the conversation which went on in the grotto. Amongst the small circle of friends who were privileged to give an opinion on the subject, it was unanimously agreed that a more agreeable home could not have been fixed on.

Beside the village road, an iron gate, set in a low-coped wall, opened on a broad gravelled walk, which, passing through a pleasant expanse of lawn, ended where a few old-fashioned stone steps led up to a paved terrace. Here stood the house ; its gabled roof, tall chimneys, and mullioned windows

showing themselves from amongst thickly clustering ivy and flowering creepers. On one side of the lawn stood a giant mulberry tree ; on the other were clusters of shrubs, and flower beds. Behind the house, an avenue of tall yew trees, clipped into formal shapes, stretched through the kitchen garden to where a white fence divided it from the orchard. Soft mossy turf covered the broad space between the old trees. The orchard presented an irregular surface of dell and hillock, like some of the fields at Smith's farm, yielding, like them, succession crops of wild flowers and bright mosses all the year through.

Within the ample doorway of the Manor-house a broad passage ran from front to back. The "great parlour"—an antique room, lighted by an enormous window—occupied nearly the whole of one side of the ground floor. Behind it, one of smaller size was already decided on as nursery and play-room. Another sitting-room (which would have seemed very large but for contrast with the "great parlour" just described), the wide oak staircase, and an open space beyond it from which the servants' offices opened, completed the accommodation downstairs.

But Ellie's own bedroom, which was to be *entirely* her own—situated, like the sitting-rooms, in front of the house, and, like them, commanding a view of the church, the pair of rose-covered cottages, and the grove beyond—this formed, of all the charms the Manor-house contained, the chiefest in her esteem.

The beginning of July saw Mr. Woodford depart on a business journey. By the close of the month

the house at Wilton was ready for habitation, and the moving began. All now was bustle and preparation. The "great parlour" at the new house was to be left unfurnished till the following year. But more than that which had sufficed for Mill Cottage would be needful to make even the smaller sitting-room there really comfortable; and, for other parts of the house, considerable additions to the present stock of furniture would be needed. Mrs. Woodford, therefore, was fully occupied, and Ellie and Harry were left to make the most of the last days in their old haunts. A large closet in the play-room at Wilton was to receive the treasures which had long outgrown the capabilities of the corner-cupboard at Mill Cottage. The white mice were to find a haven in the window-seat of Ellie's own bedroom, where they would be out of Freddie's way, and, she hoped, soon out of his recollection also.

As the time for leaving drew near, all began to discover that it would be painful to say "good-bye" to the breezy cottage and the kind people to whom it belonged. There was the grotto too. "If we could only take *that* with us, Mama," said Ellie, looking wistfully towards the favourite spot as they sat at breakfast the last morning, "Wilton would have everything I could wish for."

"That doesn't often befall us in this world, Ellie. And, having so much to please you in your new home, you must be content to give up your grotto. I am not surprised that you are sorry to leave Mill Cottage, though; you have had some happy days here."

"Oh, yes! Aunt Mary," said Harry, "*such* happy

ones, even since I've been blind. I wonder if we shall be as happy at Wilton !”

“Of course we shall, Harry, and we shall be sure to find some place there that we shall like quite as well as the grotto. Mama, may we help you in what you have to do ?”

“No, Ellie, that could not be this morning. I have to settle with Mrs. Simpson, and write to your father ; and I recommend you both to go and sit in the grotto with your book. You can have several hours there before the sun comes round. And how would it be, on this your last morning there, to remember the happy hours you have spent in it, and to think a little of *Him* who gives us all our many blessings ? But I must go now. Mrs. Simpson has offered the mill boy, with the donkey and panniers, to go over to Wilton with our last packages, and she said he would be ready by ten o'clock, so I must make haste. You take care of Harry, and I will put Freddie under Sarah's charge. Rachel is going with the boy, that she may have all ready for us when we reach Wilton in the afternoon. Mrs. Forrester will be here at three o'clock to go with us.”

The children were soon established in the grotto, and Mrs. Woodford, after having done her part towards the preparations for Rachel's departure, sat down in her bedroom to write to her husband, leaving Sarah and Rachel to complete them.

Ellie had decided that she would not trust her white mice to any of the numerous messengers between Wilton and Mill Cottage, but that she would carry them herself there when she was to

return to the cottage no more. Their cage had been that morning cleaned out with great care in honour of the removal to Wilton; and now they were replaced in their accustomed corner out of Freddie's reach.

While Sarah was busied in filling the panniers with a heterogeneous company of "last thoughts," she set baby to play while she passed from one room to the other or carried something down to the panniers.

It happened that at the last moment, when Sarah was hurriedly giving her latest instructions to Rachel, having left Freddie alone, a key was remembered, which it was necessary Rachel should take with her. Kate Simpson insisted on running up for it, telling Sarah that she would look if baby were all right, and that *she* had better finish what she was saying to Rachel. "I put it behind the mouse's cage," Sarah called out after her.

The key was found in a moment, but in her haste, instead of replacing the cage where it usually stood, Kate Simpson put it down on a chair; then giving Freddie a kiss, and telling him (without thinking any more about the mice) that Sarah would come to him "in one minute," she ran down, and delivered the key to Rachel.

Sarah was detained longer than she meant to be; but the window was open, and she would have heard in a moment had Freddie cried. When she reached the door of the room where her young charge had been left, it struck her that the silence within was ominous, and she was prepared to find Freddie at mischief of some kind, but not prepared for what

she saw. There stood the little culprit, with a white mouse grasped round the throat in his dimpled hand, while with flushed cheeks and dilated eyes he gazed on his prisoner, a mixture of terror and delight in his face which a painter might have taken as his study. He was too deeply engrossed to notice Sarah's coming till she said,—

"Oh, Baby! what are you doing? How did you get the mice?"

There was no answer, for Freddie's attention was intently fixed on the little staring red eyes and feebly-moving legs he held before him.

"Give it to me, Freddie! You have hurt it!"

"No, no," insisted Freddie, grasping his victim tighter in the fear of losing it, and stamping from one little foot to the other.

"But Ellie will be very sorry. Baby, you must let me have it! Sarah says *must!*"

Upon this Freddie laid the mouse in Sarah's hand. There was just one gasp, and its pains were over.

"Oh, Freddie, it is dead. It will never run about any more. What will Ellie say?" cried Sarah.

Freddie now bustled off, fetched the cage, and, putting it on Sarah's lap, said,—

"Put—bed; go s'leep; nice! cumsy!" shaking his head and screwing up his eyes to give the idea of extreme comfort.

"It will never go into its little bed any more, Freddie. And where's the other?" she continued, feeling amongst the wool without success.

"Gone for 'ittoo walk," said Freddie, with an encouraging nod and smile.

"Oh dear, dear!" exclaimed Sarah in real dis-

tress. "What shall I say to Ellie? I must look for it. Freddie, suppose pussy should get it!"

The search was not a long one. Floating in the water-jug, quite dead, the little mate was found, and Sarah had just taken it out and laid the pair together on the top of the cage, and was endeavouring, in her gentle way, to convince Freddie of the enormity of his offence, when the door opened, and Ellie herself entered.

"Freddie must *not* touch the mice," were her first words as she saw the cage on the chair. The next instant her eye lighted on the little dead pair.

A loud exclamation of anger, stifled as it was forcing its way—a cheek, neck, and brow flushed crimson, and Sarah saw no more. Ellie ran away, and in a moment the door of Harry's room was hastily closed and locked. Sarah knew that Harry was not there, and she stood in anxious uncertainty as to what would come next. Five minutes passed. Sarah went to the door of Harry's room and listened. Smothered sobs, as if its occupant were hiding her face on the bed, were all that could be heard. Sarah crept away, and sat down in the nursery.

It was full half-an-hour from the time of her hasty retreat, before the sound of Harry's door, being slowly unfastened, met Sarah's ear. Ellie reappeared. Her eyes were red and swollen, her cheeks very pale, but her face was composed. She went quietly up to her and said,—

"Sarah, will you bury my little mice? I know Freddie did it, and I don't want to hear about it. But do bury them, will you?"

Sarah folded her arms round Ellie, and said, "He that *overcometh* shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

"Sarah, it is *very hard* to overcome."

"Yes, dear, too hard for you. So Jesus did it for you."

"Do you think that Jesus has been hearing me when I asked Him to help me now, Sarah, and that He ever will let me be His child?"

"I am *sure* He has been hearing and helping you too, darling. And as for *letting* you be His child, why it's His own Spirit that makes people ever think about that. And perhaps, dear, He sent you this little trouble on purpose to lead you to ask His help, and to show you by a quick answer how much He is ready to do for you."

"Then, Sarah, I won't mind about my little mice. I want them to be buried, because Harry gave them to me. Will you bury them just by the grotto, where that bunch of primroses is growing?"

A sudden thought crossed Sarah's mind, and she said,

"May I bury them where I like?"

Ellie cast a quick look of surprise into Sarah's face.

"Where do you want to bury them, Sarah?"

"Why, my dear, I should like to take them to Wilton, and bury them in that bed on the lawn which you can see from your own bedroom, and to plant any flower over them that you love best, that your little mice may talk to you all the while you live there."

Ellie clung round Sarah for a moment. But

Freddie began to think it was time for him to have a share in the caresses, so, running to his nurse, he importuned to be taken up. Ellie loosened her hold; and Sarah, taking the beautiful baby face between her hands, held it up for Ellie to kiss. She complied at once, and Freddie, looking earnestly into her face, as if all unconscious of his own misdoings, said, in an inquiring voice, "Good now?"

Soon after this scene Sarah sought her mistress, and, relating what had happened, joyfully told of Ellie's first moral victory, and of what she desired to do. The Mother looked into the quiet face before her, lighted up now with tender joy, and seemed to realize more forcibly than ever before, the loving, prayerful care which she knew to be in constant exercise over her impetuous child.

"God bless you, Sarah, for loving my child's immortal soul!" was the first fervent reply.

A pause. And then :—

"I should like to get the flower myself. Trust it in my hands. You shall go on with the children to Wilton this afternoon, and I will stop at the Florist's by the way, and do the best I can."

It was a glorious day, and the beautiful home was looking its very best.

Rachel had prepared refreshment for the new inhabitants, and proudly threw open the door of the dining-room, where tea and fruit were invitingly spread in an equally inviting parlour.

The Mistress's tasteful care had been exerted to make the most of its capabilities. With its rich-looking green carpets contrasting with the polished oak wainscoting, its bright chintz coverings, and soft,

dreamy-looking muslin curtains, a *more* attractive sitting-room for family purposes could hardly have been found.

The window, with its deep, low window-seat (such as only exist now in very old houses), looked out upon the lawn. The winding village road and the church lay beyond, and then the Grove, now in the full foliage of August.

"It is the sweetest home in the whole world," said Ellie, as she leant out of the window to gather a spray of jasmine which, now in full bloom, loaded the air with sweetness.

"Well, we must take care, Ellie. We must not get too fond of it, you know," said Mrs. Woodford, as her eye fell on the church porch, where Willie had sat crowned with his birthday garland. "There is a more beautiful home than even this to be striven for."

Ellie looked out musingly, and a tumult of conflicting thoughts and desires rose in her heart. She, too, saw and remembered the place where Willie had sat; and then came to her mind, confronting one another, the joys and sorrows of her whole life—all sent, so people said, by God Himself! He made and gave her this beautiful home. He took away her darling brother, gave Harry as her dear companion, and then suffered him to be made blind for life. Why was it that God did not seem always kind? And why, oh, why was it so hard to overcome our tempers? If God really wished to have us for His children, why was it not made easier for us to love the things that please Him?

Ellie fell asleep that night striving to make the darkness of these questionings grow light.

The next morning, when breakfast was removed, Mrs. Woodford called her into the parlour with her alone. On the table stood a flower-pot, with its contents enveloped in moss and brown paper, and near it something over which Mrs. Woodford threw her handkerchief as Ellie entered.

"My dear child," she said, when the door was closed, and she had drawn Ellie to her side, "I have heard of what happened yesterday. I am thankful, O very thankful! Ellie, that you conquered as you did. The first step in the right direction, with that help which alone makes it the right way, is a blessed, happy move. May God give you many such conquests! 'Sarah told me what she wished to do; and here are the poor little favourites, and *there* is their monument" (pointing, as she concluded, to the flower-pot).

She now raised the handkerchief, and showed a small cedar box, neatly fastened up, and on it was written, "Ellie's pets." She cut the string which confined the contents of the flower-pot, saying,—

"I went to the Florist's yesterday to choose a flower to plant over the little mice, as Sarah wished. I decided on a rose-bush, because it would last many years. The man recommended this one; and, just as we were coming away, I remembered to ask him if it had a name? 'Oh yes, Ma'am,' was the reply; 'it is called the "*Rose Céleste*."' That is appropriate, Ellie; is it not? The blossoms will remind my little girl of her first victory, and they will tell her also how that victory was attained. Come now,

we will all go together, and put the little favourites in the spot which that dear Sarah of ours thought of for them. And she and I will plant the rose-tree there to remind our dear child, through, I trust, many future days, where and how she may obtain strength to *overcome*."

CHAPTER XX.

THE free unfettered country life, so long the subject of Ellie's day dreams, began with the occupation by the Woodford family of the old house at Wilton.

To the children each spot there, whether lawn, garden, or orchard, afforded a new source of pleasure, and possessed its own peculiar charm.

The poor neighbours could be visited in that quiet place without an attendant, and the children daily enlarged their acquaintance among them. Job Mason the ferryman became the favourite eventually. He could tell so many anecdotes about Wilton, its inhabitants and visitors ; of accidents on the river, and riots in the town at election times, that to the great elm-tree where Job sat making clothes-pegs, Ellie and Harry might be seen bending their steps more frequently than to any other spot beyond the walls and hedges of the Manor-house.

Smith's Farm—that dear old place—was only now distant an evening walk amongst the trees ; and the children were found taking that evening walk so often, that Mrs. Woodford said she was afraid the Master and Mistress there would be tired of seeing them. It did not seem so, however, for no

sooner were the children within sight than the farmer, if at home, hurried to meet them, got possession of Freddie, and with Ellie and Harry at his side wandered about, looking, his wife said, "as happy as if they were his own"—when, on bright Sundays, the boat from the farm touched the Wilton shore, Ellie and Harry stood on the bank waiting to receive their friends, and, taking a hand of each, went with them into the little church.

The rose "céleste" took kindly to its appointed place, where it was watched and tended with a care half superstitious on Sarah's part.

Ellie's history differed little from that of others of like temperament. It was the history of a violent temper too often yielded to, its outbursts followed by compunction and repentance ; of times when no glance towards the silent monitor on the lawn, or the pleading from that within her heart were heeded ; but when, carried away by the torrent of passion, she created sorrow for herself, and despondency in those who were watching her so anxiously. But it was not always so. The power to "overcome" often prevailed, so as even to surprise Ellie herself.

There seemed little chance that the seclusion of the Manor-house would become oppressive to the inhabitants there as some had predicted. Often as morning lessons ended, parties of twos or threes might be seen halting before the old iron gate ; and then there was a joyous exclamation from Ellie, and a bounding down the gravel walk to meet and welcome the visitors—Mrs. Forrester with Maud and David, perhaps, or Mrs. Tiverton and her daughters.

Not unfrequently Mr. and Mrs. Stanfield were unexpected guests—the lady remaining to spend the day with Mrs. Woodford and to pet her godson, while her husband strolled away with his rod and line, to return in the twilight for a “dish of tea.”

Mr. Woodford returned towards the end of September, and then all his spare hours were given to making alterations and improvements about the garden and orchard.

In November David Forrester went to London to enter on his career at the Charterhouse, and the daily tutor, who had instructed him and Maud together, being then dismissed, Mrs. Forrester's time was much occupied with Maud's education, and her visits to Wilton became less frequent.

Early in the next summer, the furniture for the “great parlour” was bought and arranged. All was selected to be in accordance with a simple country home. One article of imposing appearance was purchased, which seemed as if made to occupy the end of the great room opposite the window, and neither Master nor Mistress was long in deciding that there it should stand. This was a large bookcase, in three compartments, of rich-looking mahogany, having its doors panelled with a trellis-work of brass, lined with crimson silk. Mrs. Woodford's grand piano, usually looked upon as a cumbrous piece of furniture, here found space for its ungainly proportions, and “filled up” satisfactorily. Mrs. Forrester presented a set of chimney ornaments, and Mr. Stanfield a pair of tall fire-screens—mahogany and crimson silk to match the bookcase. And when all these attractive articles were collected and

arranged in the best possible places by her mother, Ellie began to waver in her old feeling of contempt for "rooms."

Two years passed by. Two happy years of simple home pleasures. No sorrow, no care. Old friends around, and scarcely a change amongst them all. The children were shooting up in stature, and making steady progress in the schoolroom. Freddie, the pet of the whole village (which in this instance must be made to include Smith's Farm—for there he reigned with most despotic sway)—Freddie, the darling and plague of all, was growing into a sturdy little man, as beautiful after his kind as the angel-brother, but not the fragile unearthly blossom that Willie had been. Master Freddie had as determined a will of his own as might wholly dispel the notion that he was not fit for this world. He seemed, on the contrary, prepared to give it battle with right good will, and, but for his careful training, might soon have grown into a great anxiety. But love and gentleness were doing their work. With his mother and Sarah, take him all in all, Freddie was tolerably manageable.

The father of this now happy circle, much softened by his improved position, and yet more by the blessed influences of his home, rarely showed those dispositions which for many years had been so repulsive to his friends. Adversity had taught him many salutary lessons. And now, under improved fortune, he looked on the future without anxiety, and on the past as a warning. One shadow, it is true, still hung over him. But where is the home without a shadow here?

Thus in the midst of so much earthly blessing, Ellie entered on the year whose closing summer was to bring her twelfth birthday. The following spring she would become a pupil at Miss Merton's, and she and Harry would be separated—a thought which began, as the time drew nearer, to hang heavily on more than one young heart in that happy home. But true to the charge she had undertaken to cheer and comfort her “own little brother” at all times, Ellie never talked of the parting with him. Pictures were drawn continually, however, of the time when, schooldays passed and separation ended, they would return to their sweet home, and “live at Wilton always.”

A general interest was now excited in the circle of especial friends whom five years of kindly intercourse had bound so closely to each other, by the approaching marriage of Dr. Forrester's eldest son. Individually Percy Forrester was unknown to most of these friends. He had never visited his parents since they came to Stockington. But the regard all bore his father and mother had made Percy's name a household word among them, and it was well known that nothing but a stronger attraction than even that of parents had diverted his steps from his father's threshold in the few holiday seasons he could command.

Even Maud was busy with her needle now, and Ellie and Harry were not to be outdone. They, too, must each make a wedding present for Percy's new home.

Freddie seeing the interest which these preparations excited, and having fallen under his sister's

displeasure many times for touching her wools and pulling the frame to get a peep at her work, besides handling Harry's delicate plaiting with little black fingers, just fresh from grubbing in the garden, began to get tired of the repeated "Now, Freddie, go away. You musn't touch," and to think that *he* should like to "do a pretty thing for Mary," that he *might* touch. In reply to a petition which tallied with this wish, Ellie said that a dead chicken, or a butterfly with its wings pulled off, was the only kind of thing Freddie could "do," and she thought it would serve him right to send some of these performances of his to Percy and Mary, and say who did them. At this Freddie looked abashed ; for many a poor little victim, since the white mice perished, had been unloosed from his grasp to make a short struggle, and breathe no more.

Dr. and Mrs. Forrester, accompanied by Maud, left home in the middle of May for Mr. Welstead's vicarage, near London, to be present at Percy's marriage, promising Ellie and Harry a full account of the wedding, and that they would engage the bride and bridegroom to spend the next Christmas at Stockington.

CHAPTER XXI.

DURING the winter months Ellie and Harry had to a considerable extent cast aside their childish games for amusements of a higher order. In the long winter evenings, books and work at Mrs. Woodford's side had taken the place of dominoes and the private feast of fairy tales, or the scarcely less wonderful stories invented by Ellie herself.

Poetry gained eventually the greatest share of favour, and by the time the summer had returned, an entirely new source of interest had thus been opened to the children. The seat under the mulberry-tree now, with the mother beside them, and old Shakspeare or Milton in her hand, seemed a combination of pleasures which nothing could have improved.

Guests came and went. Old pleasures were renewed ; old haunts sought out. And so the summer passed.

Autumn, too, was gone. A few weeks more, and the longed-for guests would arrive at Stockington—Percy and his bride. Paul Tiverton, too, was to take a holiday, and come with them. Old and young alike looked joyfully forward to this visit. Each

had some plan of pleasure to suggest connected with it.

Till a whisper of dread caused all to pause and tremble. The whisper swelled into a wail. Christmas, which was to have welcomed the young bride at Stockington, saw its snow-flakes fall upon her grave.

The woe which followed needs no description here. The chief mourner went abroad for change of scene, and the departure of Ellie and Harry for London, which had been fixed for the end of March, was postponed till midsummer, that Dr. and Mrs. Forrester, under whose charge they were to travel, might meet their eldest son on his return.

It had been decided by his parents that Harry's education should be completed at an Institution for the Blind at Cranford, in Downshire. His journey was to take place at the same time as Ellie's, that they might travel together as far as London. This plan remained unaltered. But Percy Forrester's movements delayed its execution. A few months' reprieve arose, and Wilton skies would be above the brother and sister for a little longer.

But the parting time arrived. Maud came to spend two or three days at Wilton that she might see the last of Harry, and was to remain there during her parents' absence. The boxes were packed, the farewells all spoken amongst the neighbours.

Ellie and Harry were going in an hour or two into Stockington, to sleep there that they might be ready for the London coach the next morning, which now contrived to make the journey in one day.

Mrs. Forrester had recommended that the children should take leave of all the dear ones in the Manor-house the evening before their journey, that, their first sorrow spent, they might have a greater chance of sleeping well, and thus be better prepared for their long day's travel. With a similar hope Mrs. Woodford acquiesced in the plan. Having made every preparation for her child's comfort that love could suggest, she now sat in the parlour, waiting, with tea prepared, the last gathering of the family circle there for many months to come. To encourage those about her, she wore an outward composure which ill accorded with her feelings. Harry leaned at the open window, listening to the well-known sounds of village life which had so often greeted his ear throughout the happy time that Wilton had been his chief home—the sheep-bell in the churchyard; the children playing on the green; the lowing cattle; and, nearer still, Freddie's childish voice in eager questioning—and tears flowed afresh from the shaded eyes.

The gorgeous sun was sinking, and shed long slanting beams across the lawn, and where they touched a flower or leaf, lighted it up into tenfold vividness of tint.

Ellie, from her window, looked out upon this scene, and thought of her coming to Stockington that winter night, and of all that had followed. Beautiful beyond expression seemed her village home, and dearer than words could tell were those within it. And now she was going away, and would see it no more for years. Her thoughts had reached this point when Sarah came into the room,

holding in her hand a bunch of the delicate flowers from the rose *céleste*. Her eyes were red and swollen, and she looked full of sadness.

"Ellie, darling," she said, folding her young charge tenderly in her arms, "you are going away all amongst strangers; and temptations, perhaps, that you don't yet know anything about may come upon you. You'll be sad, too, maybe dear, when you're away from us, and haven't these with you who will think about your feelings as we do. I've been meditating upon it all till I couldn't bear to go on thinking. But then I know who there is—nearer and better than any of us, who will watch over you. And all the comfort I've got about it is that He will know everything, and that you never will want for help at any time, if you do but seek it at the right place, darling. And He has said, you know, 'if two shall agree on earth about anything, and ask for it, it shall be done.' And shan't we agree about this, my dear, do you think—your sweet Mama and your poor nurse? Won't it be our desire and our prayer that our two dear children may be kept safe from evil?"

"I know it will, Sarah. I know how you have loved us, and that it is all you and dear Mama who have made our home so happy. Harry has been good and gentle and loving to you, but I have not."

A pause, and the tears flowed fast.

"Now that's not true, my dear. Why, I've been as sure of your love for me in the midst of a great passion, as when you were sitting by my side, and telling me that there wasn't such another nurse-maid in the world as your Sarah. And I've known

always how, when the fit was over, you'd come and put your arms round me, and pant and sob out your sorrow on my neck—not for the sake of saying it, but because your warm little heart really felt it. And, oh ! my dear, if you had brought me the King's crown, and told me it was mine, I couldn't have been half as joyful as I was when the little white mice were killed, and my Ellie came in with her pale face, and asked me so gently to bury them for her ! And many times since it has been so, only one always recollects the first best ; and till I lie down in my grave I shall never forget that day, I believe."

"Ah ! And Sarah, I know that was because you had prayed so much for me."

"And so we will again, darling. Perfect victory isn't gained all at once, Ellie. There must be a good many hard battles before that comes."

A clamorous knocking of little fists at the door, and an announcement that "Mama had been waiting tea for a long time," here put an end to the conversation.

When the darkness of night closed about Ellie and her "brother," they had exchanged the still beauty of their country home for the busy town of Stockington. When next the sun descended, old scenes were left far behind, and they were approaching the great city of London.

Hand in hand, without a word, they sat. Ellie saw the lights of the great city twinkling about, and knew that the dreaded moment was near. She hardly noticed, as the coach stopped, that several eager faces were trying to peer into it. She sat as if not knowing that she was expected to alight.

"Now, my dear children," Dr. Forrester began, in tones of sympathy.

"There he is—there's Percy!" exclaimed Mrs. Forrester, and the next moment the door was opened by a gentleman outside, and the mother and son were clasped in a close embrace. Ellie could not see Percy's face in the imperfect light. She was too full of grief even to *care* to see him whom she had so long wished to know.

At this moment a face was pushed into the coach, and a voice said :—

"You're there, Elspy, I suppose, though I can't see you."

Dr. Forrester stepped up.

"Mrs. Woodford, I presume?" he said, raising his hat.

"Yes. I've the pleasure of speaking to Dr. Forrester, I suppose? Is my granddaughter in there?"

"She is. Come, my dear, we are going into the inn for a few moments."

So saying, he assisted Ellie and Harry to alight, and led them into a dreary little parlour whither Mrs. Forrester and Percy had already preceded them. They were followed by Mrs. Woodford and an old gentleman, who, laying his hand on Ellie's shoulder, told her he was grandpapa, and asked if she recollected him. The only reply was "No," in a voice scarcely audible.

The light now shone full on Percy Forrester, who, having greeted his young brother, stood silently looking on the weeping children with an expression so full of sympathy, that it stayed the flippant

remark with which Mrs. Woodford was about to try her skill at putting an end to the tears.

"Let them sit down for a few minutes," he said, placing two chairs close beside each other for them.

"Yes, do; and I will go and call a coach," said Dr. Forrester. "Percy," he whispered, "see what you can do with them while I am gone."

As Percy placed the chairs, Ellie removed the handkerchief into which she was sobbing, and raised her eyes to thank him.

A momentary pause. An expression of sheer astonishment. And then a sunray of pleasure, swift as lightning, shot over her pale and tearful face.

"You are the —— that gentleman at Smith's Farm!" she exclaimed, in tones of joy.

"Is this really my little Smith's Farm friend?" he said, bending his grave thoughtful eye (now lighted with a smile of pleased surprise) on Ellie's face.

"Yes. I have remembered you ever since. I don't think I should ever have forgotten you."

For the moment sorrow was banished, and the children thought only of the joy of this unlooked-for recognition.

"Harry, I shall not be miserable now," said Ellie, "not so very miserable now. I know Percy will be kind and loving to you; and think how nice it'll be to have him near you—Springfield, you know, they say, is only just a short drive from Cranford! I remember," she continued, "just as if it were yesterday, how good you were to me," and she looked up into Percy's face, with a grateful smile.

"You seemed really sorry that I was unhappy, and tried so much to comfort me, and *did indeed* comfort me. And now I shall give my Harry into your care. He wants some one," she went on, laying her hand pleadingly upon Percy's arm, her eyes still fixed on his, "to describe things to him, and to lead him about to the pleasantest spots, and then just to tell him how everything looks. *I* have always done that ever since he was blind—and now"—

The lips trembled, and the sentence remained unfinished.

"You say that once, in a very short interview, I was able to cheer you, Ellie. Perhaps I may be equally successful with your dear little 'brother' when we are together," said Percy.

"But who will think about Ellie? who will comfort her?" asked Harry, in despairing tones.

"Oh! never mind about *me*, dear. I shall try to fancy all that Percy will say to you. I am glad. I can't help feeling *joyful* even, now that I have seen him again, and that he is really your brother, Harry."

"Then we have a rainbow in this heavy cloud, after all, Ellie, have we not?" said Percy. "Shall we try to think most of that to-day? I am very glad, I assure you, to meet the little 'Autumn Crocus' again," he added, taking her hand, and smiling kindly upon her. Ellie's smile answered his own, and her thoughts wandered back over a six years' space. To those thoughts she was about to give expression, when a voice sounded behind her which drove far away both pleasant and sad remembrances

of the past, and caused the cheerless present to stand out again in all its leaden tints.

"Come, Elspy, we must go. Your grandfather has got a coach; the luggage is all up, and he's waiting—a thing he's not fond of, I can tell you."

Percy still held Ellie's hand, and strove to concentrate into its farewell grasp all of assurance and of cheer that mere gesture would command. Mrs. Woodford's manner checked any final word of consolation.

Separated by an ungentle hand from the last embrace with Harry, Ellie was put into the coach with her grandparents, and in an agony of weeping, she shrank into a corner, and was driven away to Manchester Place.

Her emotion was not easily subdued. But when she was seated in the comfortable parlour at Mrs. Woodford's, and had, at her grandmother's command, partaken of some refreshments, she ventured to ask if she should go on to Miss Merton's the next day. Her mother had said it would be better for her to get to work as soon as possible, and she would like it best herself. Old Mrs. Woodford was also fortunately of the opinion that it would be the best thing for her.

Ellie's grandparents, therefore, accompanied her, soon after breakfast on the following morning, to the stage coach which was to convey her to the care of the Misses Merton.

CHAPTER XXII.

MILFORD RECTORY, left vacant by a non-resident rector, was a solid respectable-looking place. Its ample dimensions made it peculiarly suited for a school, and for many years past the Misses Merton had successfully occupied it for that purpose.

These ladies were three in number. The eldest was an old maid of sternest mould ; grave, moreover, to a degree which gave the effect, whenever she *did* laugh, of her having done something wrong and unnatural. She was housekeeper, and rarely appeared in the schoolroom excepting to carve at dinner. Her vigilance was such that few of the household heard her step without trepidation.

Miss Clara, Ellie's godmother, in compliment to whom she had received her second name, was plump and genial. Her always pleasing expression of countenance rendered her a strong and agreeable contrast to her eldest sister. She passed the greater part of her time in the schoolroom, and all needlework, and the care of the wardrobes of the whole establishment, were under her superintendence. She was a favourite with every one.

Miss Janet, the youngest of the three, observed a

happy medium between the decided plumpness of her second, and the spareness of her eldest sister. Her face readily fell into a smile ; and there was often a twinkle in her eye which told of a little fun still lurking somewhere, though generally obscured by the heaps of learning and propriety befitting the virtual head of an "Establishment for Young Ladies." She had received an education superior to that of either of her sisters, and was by them and by her pupils regarded as a miracle of erudition.

Ellie was received by her godmother, who seemed interested about her home, and put many questions concerning her parents and little Freddie.

"And so you are to write to Harry Forrester, Elspeth, are you? How came you and he to be such friends?"

"Harry said he would be my brother when he first came to Stockington, and since he became blind we have been always together," replied Ellie, her eyes filling with tears as she heard Harry's name pronounced.

"Well, it is contrary to the rules here for young ladies to write to their adopted brothers. But as Harry has met with such a sad misfortune, Miss Janet has consented to your infringing them occasionally. When you write, you will do it under her direction."

Poor Ellie! Was *that* to be the style of her correspondence with her distant "brother"? Her heart sank at the announcement, and the tears chased each other down her cheeks.

"There, dry them up," said Miss Clara, putting her arm round Ellie. "All the little girls, and great

ones, too, are happy here. But I don't want you to forget your dear Mama. There are few children who have such a Mama to remember. Now, come with me, and take off your walking dress."

Ellie followed her godmother up the wide staircase into a bedroom, delicious from its airy cheerfulness and the spotless purity of its draperies.

"You will sleep here, Elspeth," said her conductor. "This is my room. The two Miss Willetts and the two Miss Arnolds also sleep here ; Lina Willett with me, and Phœbe, the eldest, with you ; the Miss Arnolds have that bed together. They all four come from a warm climate, and require care, so I keep them under my own eye. You are admitted because you are my goddaughter."

Ellie was again desired to follow Miss Clara, and was led up another flight of stairs, to a long room at the top of the house. Down the whole of one side was a washing-stand, with many basins placed at intervals, and cans of sparkling water stood beneath it. The opposite side of the room was occupied by a wardrobe, the doors of which Miss Clara opened, showing different compartments, each marked with its owner's name. She then led the way downstairs again to the—schoolroom.

The dreaded moment had come. The ordeal of introduction, however, was less formidable than Ellie's imagination had pictured it. The general bustle and movement showed that business was just over for the morning, and all were too fully engaged to notice the new comer much at the moment. One long table, which stood in the middle of the room, and a shorter one placed transversely at its end,

were being rapidly cleared. A cluster of juniors round Miss Clara's table were folding up work. At the door of a large light closet, on the opposite side of the room, stood a teacher, admitting two of the young students at a time to replace their educational implements there.

Neatness and order reigned in every department.

Ellie became interested in the busy scene at once. Miss Clara asked some questions amongst the girls standing near her, on the business of the day, and then said, in a louder tone :—

“Lina Willett ! come here and speak to this little girl. She is my goddaughter, of whom you have heard so often—Elspeth Woodford.”

The child thus addressed appeared about Ellie's own age, a bright little maiden with sparkling dark eyes, and hair of the deepest shade of brown. She stepped forward with a smile, and shook hands with Ellie. At that moment her sister came from another part of the room to speak to Miss Clara ; Lina introduced her, and Miss Clara added :—

“Phœbe, you and Lina must make my goddaughter acquainted with her companions. I give her into your charge while everything here is new to her.”

That Phœbe and Lina were twins might be guessed at a glance. But Phœbe's countenance was thoughtful and tender, while Lina's told more of fun and mischief. Each had a pleasant smile, and each greeted Ellie cordially.

“It is my week to see the work put away,” said Lina, “but I will come and talk to you soon.”

“And mine to see the short table cleared and to

take the forfeits," said Phœbe. "It is *almost* done now."

The sisters redeemed their promise quickly, and then received directions from Miss Clara to take Ellie over the house and round the garden. Each accordingly took a hand of the stranger, and led her away.

"We are so glad you have come," said Phœbe. "All the girls knew you were expected, and have been looking forward to seeing you. Miss Clara has told us so much about you and the little blind boy you are so fond of." "This is the drawing-room," she continued, opening the door of a long room, with three windows which looked into the garden. "We don't often come here. The drawing lessons are given in this room on account of the light."

The "pink parlour," and all other rooms in which the pupils had any interest, were similarly introduced.

"Now come into the garden," said Phœbe, as she led the way there. "Look at this beautiful terrace-walk ; we call it the Filbert-walk, because all those trees down the bank are filbert bushes. I'm sure you must think this pleasant?"

"Yes, it is," said Ellie.

"But," continued Phœbe, "there is the first dinner bell. We must run and change our frocks, and you had better come and smooth your hair. You cannot think how particular Miss Clara is about our appearance."

Thus advised, Ellie hurried with her conductors to the dressing-room, which was now filling fast. As

they entered, Phœbe whispered, "We are not allowed to speak here. There are the rules." Having pointed Ellie to a large sheet of paper fastened to the wall, the sisters proceeded silently to perform and assist each other in the arrangement of their dress.

Ellie felt that every eye in the room was upon her. But not even a whisper was exchanged in any part of it; and soon the welcome sound of the second dinner bell removed the ordeal for the time.

When Ellie and her new friends reached the schoolroom, Miss Merton was already in her place at the dinner-table. Ellie was led up to her, and was greeted with a grim smile, and a stiff shake of the hand, and desired to take her seat "There, by Miss Janet." Grace was then said in French by a young lady at one table, and in English by one at the other, and the business of dinner began. Miss Janet's place, and two others on the opposite side of the table from Ellie's, remained still vacant.

The knives and forks were being vigorously plied when Miss Janet walked briskly into the room, followed by two young girls, each carrying her portfolio of music. The elder lady took her place, and then, observing the stranger, held out her hand, saying:—

"This is Elspeth Woodford, I suppose? So you have really arrived then, at last? What a little truant you are! We have all been hard at work these ten days past. How are Mama and Papa? quite well?"

Ellie laid down her knife and fork that she might give suitable replies.

"Go on with your dinner," said Miss Janet. "We are such busy people here, that we must lose no time till the day's duties are done." "We shall see each other again, I dare say," she added, with a smile.

Meanwhile, the two young girls who had come into the room with Miss Janet, had disposed of their portfolios, and taken their seats opposite Ellie. They were now all three staring at each other, with glowing cheeks, in undisguised astonishment and evident pleasure.

When dinner was over, the pupils were desired to take the air in the playground for half an hour. Ellie's former companions secured her, and led her off. They were quickly followed by the sisters who had sat opposite Ellie at the dinner-table. Without waiting for an introduction, the elder of the two said, in a half pleased, half bashful way:—

"Aren't you the little girl we travelled with down to Murfield, about seven years ago? Your Mama was with you, and a pretty little boy—almost a baby. You went on further than we did. I dare say you were going to Stockington then."

"Oh, yes! I remember. At first I could not think where I had seen you. You have both grown much."

"And so have you. But you have not altered in anything else, only your curls are longer. What a nice lady your Mama was! We have often talked about you all since." "And you know the Forresters!" she added eagerly. "It is so curious that it was a cousin of ours—the one we were going to visit when we travelled with you—who married

Dr. Forrester's eldest son. Did you hear much about Mary's death?"

"Yes," said Ellie, sadly and reluctantly, for Percy's grief seemed too sacred a thing to be talked of in the playground, surrounded by groups of merry girls. "I saw Percy the day I came to London. And we knew everything about poor Mary's death at the time."

The conversation continued for some time in the same strain. At last Annie exclaimed, "See! All the girls are going in. I didn't hear the bell."

"Why, Annie, you have been talking so fast that it's no wonder you didn't hear it," said her sister.

"Ah, yes. And I have not said half I wished." "Your name is Elspeth, isn't it?" she inquired, turning again to Ellie. "Mine is Annie; and hers" (pointing to her sister) "is Esther. We won't call each other 'Miss.' The Willetts and we never do."

The afternoon occupations consisted of history classes and needlework. Ellie was seated at Miss Clara's elbow.

All went busily on till the word of command was given by Miss Clara to put away books and work, and clear the room for tea. At the close of the meal, Ellie went with her godmother to unpack the boxes. On the larger one being opened, the first thing that met Ellie's eye was the bunch of roses which Sarah had gathered on the evening her young mistress left Wilton. They were crushed and withered now; but they recalled so vividly happy scenes in the home far away, that, taken by surprise, and overcome by the tide of recollections which the faded blossoms brought to her mind, Ellie uttered

an exclamation of pain, and throwing herself on her knees hid her face among the dead roses, just as she would have done on Sarah's or her mother's neck, one week before. Forgetting now Miss Clara and the Rectory, and everything else but home and all its dear ones, she wept so passionately that her godmother was at some loss what to do or say. She waited a little, and then said kindly but firmly :

"Elspeth, I cannot allow you to give way in this manner. It is very likely to make your head ache, and then you will not be fit for your duties to-morrow. The best and wisest thing you can do now will be to improve in everything as much as possible before you go back to Wilton ; not to be fretting because you have left it. Get up, my dear, and dry your eyes, and let me direct you where to put your clothes. There, you had better lay those flowers in some paper. Fasten them up ; and I advise you not to look at them again for a month. You wish to keep them, I suppose ? "

Ellie whispered, "If you please, Ma'am," and strove to obey the mandate to "dry" her "eyes."

As twilight came on, the girls grouped themselves into little parties, and walked up and down the long schoolroom, telling tales of the recent holidays, and of the pleasures or disappointments they had then met with. The Willetts and Arnolds took Ellie between them, and they paced the room together.

At eight o'clock precisely, silence was demanded by the principal teacher, and Miss Clara appeared. She took her place at the end of the long table.

A prayer from Mavor's spelling-book was then repeated with rigorous correctness by one of the

elder girls, at the close of which they all kissed Miss Clara, and, with teachers in front and rear, were marched off to their bedrooms, receiving as they went away a parting injunction from the Lady Superior not to speak a word when they got there—a restriction not relished by the majority, but welcome now to Ellie, who, feeling in a whirl with all she had seen and heard during the day, longed for silence, that she might indulge in those thoughts which had been so abruptly quelled by Miss Clara's practical suggestions.

All were expected to kneel for five minutes beside their beds before entering them. There Ellie strove to think and plead. How comforting and helpful the remembrance that her mother, Harry, and Sarah, would all be petitioning for her as she for them!

Was she not thus really *with* them, although they seemed so far away?

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FEW days served to initiate Ellie in the routine of her new duties.

Her intimacy with the other favoured occupants of Miss Clara's bedroom grew rapidly. The five soon came to be acknowledged a little separate clique, always associating most with each other, and having their own especial objects of interest. Quarrels were not wanting, even amongst this separated few. Ellie's irritability we have known of old. Lina was pettish sometimes. Annie Arnold could be sarcastic, and Esther determined. But Phœbe seemed resolved that peace should prevail where she was, and she contrived many devices for turning impending storms to sunshine. Under her influence, therefore, the course of things went on smoothly enough between "the friends."

Beyond that small circle we can say but little in Ellie's favour. She soon learnt to follow the stream, and gave evil for evil, and railing for railing, as she saw and heard done by most of the others around her. There were also serious complaints from time to time, on the part of Miss Janet, Miss Clara, and the teachers. Ellie was by no means so attentive or

so persevering as she might and ought to be. "Excellent abilities, but no application," was Miss Janet's verdict ; "and without application, Elspeth, you will find your abilities of very small service." Such remarks would send "Elspeth" off into a dream about Wilton, and lessons in the dear old parlour, with Harry at her side, Mama teaching, and Sarah to run to and tell of her successes or failures, when the duties were over. For Ellie remembered full many a time hearing the same sentiment from her mother's lips ; but how differently it always closed ! Some word of rebuke or exhortation, chosen fitly from the Book of Life, had made Ellie feel as though she were engaged in a different work then from that which occupied her now, when the motive set before her was so different. But when her mother's letters came, they reminded her of the right aim and end of every duty. Then, for a while, Ellie would work with diligence ; and Miss Janet would note the change, and wonder that such "very mature" suggestions could have any effect on the mind of a child of thirteen.

Thus, in mingled wrong and right, the months went past, and the holidays were drawing nigh. Each inmate of the Rectory now became absorbed in preparation ; while every unoccupied interval was filled with joyful anticipations concerning home, and friends, and Christmas festivities.

Bright enough the prospect looked to Ellie, amongst the rest, while she was pressing on, like her companions, with something which was to be learned or completed "by the *holidays*." It seemed then as if they must bring joy to her, as well as

to the rest. But when the time was close at hand, and all was completed that could now be done, and Ellie, in the stillness of her bedroom, began practically to survey the prospect before her, her pillow was often wet with tears. For Ellie was not going *home* ! It had been decided that the holidays, which would occur during the proposed period of her stay at the Rectory, should be spent with the friends who lived within a short distance of Milford. There would be no Harry now to lead about, to whom she could tell every thought and wish ! Not this or any other of the dear *old* pleasures, whatever the holidays might bring !

She had received a letter from Rose, containing a glowing programme for those four weeks. But Ellie could not bear new people ; and Rose's list of the friends they were to visit contained none but strange names to her. Indeed, Rose herself was a stranger. Aunt Jessie had faded from her recollection ; and Grandmama Lister was more forgotten than either.

"If she is like Grandmama Woodford," said Ellie to herself, "I should prefer staying where I am for the holidays to going to Cowley at all. *Mama* says she is different, and that I must find out for myself what makes her so. I'm sure I hope she *is* different. But then *Mama* never will confess that Grandmama Woodford is disagreeable. She can't help *thinking* so, though, I'm certain. Well ! I don't expect to be happy this Christmas. I shall spend most of my holidays in writing to Harry and to *Mama*."

The 18th of December was the day to which all

thoughts were now directed within the walls of Milford Rectory.

Miss Janet was busy looking over the weekly reports of diligence and general conduct; going through examinations, and preparing certain cards, one of which each pupil took with her to her home. These contained, in Miss Janet's faultless penmanship, a condensed account of good or bad conduct, of attention and improvement or otherwise, during the half-year.

It was a nervous moment to each young damsel as she descended in her turn to the "Pink Parlour" to receive from that lady's hand this brief but pointed comment on the past, to be subsequently presented to Miss Clara, that as each trunk was packed the owner's card might be laid in it by her hand the last thing, to meet the mother's eye the first when home should be reached.

Ellie's card, as she had foreboded, was not what she would have liked to send home at the close of her first school campaign. It spoke of more perseverance needed, more real desire for improvement, and less impetuosity of temper. Ellie looked down upon it, and an expression of pain passed over her face as she read. It was not the kind of expression Miss Janet was accustomed to see when she placed an unfavourable report in the hands of her pupils. It excited her curiosity.

"Is it not what you expected, Elspeth?" she inquired gravely but not unkindly.

"I know I *ought* to have expected it, Ma'am," replied Ellie in a low voice.

"But you thought I should show you some favour

as it was your first half-year, or perhaps because you are Miss Clara's goddaughter, eh ? ”

“That would not have been right,” said Ellie bluntly. “Mama would rather hear the truth, even if I have not done well.”

“You are afraid Mama will be displeased with this account, I daresay ? ”

“Oh no, I'm not. She won't be displeased. But it will grieve her, I am sure, and Harry and Sarah too ; and that is worse to think of than any one's being *displeased*. They will all love me just the same ; but I *wish* I had anything pleasant to send them,” and Ellie looked at the little card as if she would have given a great deal to be able to make it a more cheering report.

“Well, Elspeth, you must think of all this at the *beginning* of next half-year. I shall be glad to give you something that will be satisfactory to Mama in all respects, if you will try to deserve it. But for this time I can make no alteration.”

Ellie curtsied, and withdrew in silence, heartily wishing at the moment that there were to be no holidays at all, and that the day of beginning her duties again had arrived, that she might at once enter on a fresh opportunity for obtaining a fairer record.

The prescribed number of formal letters had been exchanged with Harry during the half-year. Ellie's were all written at Miss Janet's side, and inspected by her eye. Harry's were said to be dictated by himself. But they seemed sadly unlike her own Harry. They were so stiff and constrained in their expression, that instead of giving her any

pleasure they had at first only distressed her. But the thought had soon crossed her mind that Harry must find it impossible to believe that those rigidly correct epistles she had sent him could come from the same Ellie with whom he had been used to hold such familiar intercourse of old ; and as she knew *herself* unchanged, she resolved to take comfort in the thought that Harry was so too. The holidays would show, and they were close at hand.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GREAT rattling of keys, stumbling over boxes, impatient queries about some mislaid article of dress, mingled with headlong rushings up and down stairs in an incomplete state of toilette, accompanied the dawn of the 18th of December in Milford Rectory. It was every one for herself, and all for getting home, when that long looked-for day arrived.

Before noon, Ellie found herself jogging sleepily along in the two-horse coach towards Cowley, in deep meditation as to what Harry might then be doing, and conjecturing whether or not he was thinking of her. She had a good hour and a-half with Harry and Wilton before she was aroused by a remark from one of the passengers:—"Here's Cowley at last!"

The coach now turned abruptly to the left, and presently stopped before a row of lime-trees, guarded on the side next the road by a number of white posts linked together with chains. Ellie glanced up at the house to which the lime-trees and posts belonged, and at that moment the door was opened, and a young girl bounded down the steps and gravel-walk,

her cheeks glowing with health and excitement, and her long curls looking golden as they caught the sunlight. Behind her followed a short, plump lady, about whom Ellie had no time to speculate. Rose's joyous greeting engrossed the few moments which elapsed while the boxes were being removed from the coach. It was only when she found herself encircled by the lady's arm, and heard Rose say, "Oh, Aunt Jessie! isn't she like Mama?" that Ellie could believe any one so unlike her mother to be her mother's sister.

Aunt Jessie, however, it was; and a kind greeting she gave to Ellie. She then led her into a comfortable parlour whose bright crimson curtains, with the sun upon them, shed a glow over the room, which produced a cheerful and pleasant effect. Miss Lister assisted in taking off Ellie's walking-dress; Rose pouring forth, meanwhile, a torrent of inquiries about the Rectory.

"Is Grandmama Lister quite well?" asked Ellie.

"Yes, pretty well, but getting an old lady, liking the quiet of her own room, for the greater part of her time. But she will dine with us, and in the evening she generally remains downstairs for several hours, if we are alone. Come, now, and see her."

Aunt Jessie then led the way upstairs to a room at the back of the house, where the object of Ellie's speculations was seated near the fire.

A countenance so sweet and placid, and so like her Mother's, met Ellie's eye, that she half stopped in crossing the room to greet her Grandmama, overcome by feelings of joy and tender remem-

brance. She stooped down to kiss the old lady, who, taking her head lovingly between her hands, and impressing a long kiss upon her brow, said,—

“God bless thee, my dear little maid.”

The person, manner, and mode of address were indeed different from those of another relative, who had hitherto been Ellie’s ideal of Grandmamas generally. She was taken by surprise, and could think of nothing she considered suitable to say. But, throwing her arms round the old lady’s neck, she clung to her for several moments without speaking at all.

“Mother’s face, I see,” said Mrs. Lister, when Ellie relaxed her hold and looked up.

“Oh, Grandmama! That is just what I was thinking of *you* when I came into the room.”

“Didn’t I say you were like Mama, Ellie? Though I have not seen her for so long, you brought her to my mind directly.”

“Why, Rose, Mama is very pretty!”

“I didn’t say you were as handsome as Mama, Miss Ellie.”

“If she is like ‘Mama’ in other things, we shall not be careful about the face and figure,” said Mrs. Lister, smiling admiringly on the refined-looking girl before her.

“No, Grandmama, indeed I am *not* in anything,” said Ellie, a painful remembrance of the ‘card’ crossing her mind as she spoke.

“Well, we will decide that another time,” said Rose. “I want you to see the house before dinner, while it is full daylight. Come with me, and I will

show you the inside now ; and after dinner we will go into the garden."

The door closed, and Rose introduced her sister to a square, comfortable house, of moderate dimensions, too much like other square, comfortable houses to call for especial description.

"Now, here we are, Ellie," Rose continued, after rattling away throughout her introductory journey from parlour to attic, "at our own bedroom door again. I hope you recognise it, and that you think *my* home equal to yours at Wilton. Don't shake your head ! Wait till you have lived in this cosy nest for a month. Now I'm going to help you unpack ; so, let us begin at once, or we shall hear the dinner-bell before the business is half over."

"Rose, do tell me," said Ellie, as the sisters busied themselves with the unpacking, "what it is we are going to do this Christmas. Shall we be *obliged* to go to London ?"

"Obliged ! Is that the way you speak of it ? Why, I've been looking forward these six months to going with you, and introducing you to all the people we know there. But perhaps you would prefer staying at Cowley with Grandmama ; and Aunt Jessie and I can attend the festivities ?"

"Yes, I really think I should. I do so dislike strange people."

"And I '*really think*' you must do no such thing. I wonder what Grandmama Woodford and the Strachans would say, if they were told you did not wish to go and see them !"

"I never can get on with Grandmama Woodford. Do *you* get on well with her ?"

"Famously! You know I am a great favourite. I can persuade her to do many things which no one else can ; and she really is very kind to me."

"That's more than I can say. She used to make me so angry when she came to Stockington ; and she was always getting me into scrapes with Papa. Are the Strachans nice people?"

"Oh, yes ! Eliza is my especial friend, you know. We always spend Christmas Day there ; and this year you and I are to stay till New Year's Eve. This is on *your* account, that they may show their country cousin the sights. Then we shall go back to Grandmama Woodford's, to be ready for a great party at the Cresswells on New Year's Day, and something that Miss Cresswell *calls* a party, at her house, the evening before. That is *dreadful*. She has no piano, and the old people always play cards ; and we young ones can do nothing but look on, and talk, and—"

"Oh, stop, Rose ! Do tell me who the Cresswells are ?"

"Miss Cresswell is a friend of Grandmama Woodford's. She has a brother who lives at Penley Lodge, near Grandmama's. His little girls go to school at Miss Blake's here, where I learn music, and dancing, and so forth. There's the dinner-bell ! I've quantities more to tell you ; but I shall have plenty of time. We are not going to London till the morning of Christmas Eve."

"And then shall we go straight to the Strachans, Rose ?"

"We shall sleep at Grandmama Woodford's that night. *They* always dine at the Strachans on

Christmas Day. You know, of course, that old Mr. Strachan is Grandpapa Woodford's brother-in-law? They will go with us to Bedford-square, and then we shall be left there for a week.—Dreadful to think of! isn't it?" she added, laughing, as she noticed Ellie's discomfited face. "Well, for the present, you are safe at Cowley, with only three other persons besides servants in the house. Why, here is Grandmama in her place, all ready and waiting for us!"

As the girls entered the dining-room, the old lady smiled and held out a hand to each; and Ellie had opportunity now to observe her more particularly than in the unexpected excitement of the first interview.

The traces of sorrow were visible on her face; but it wore also that expression of grief subdued, which only a living faith in the wisdom and love of all God's dealings with His children can produce.

The four sat down to the dinner-table, and Rose still continued the chief speaker.

"Do you know, Grandmama," she said, while she helped her Aunt with the carving, "Ellie wants to stay here with you, while Aunt Jessie and I go up to all the grand Christmas doings in London?"

"You would change your mind, my dear, I think, before many days were over."

"This seems such a quiet, pleasant place, Grandmama. I think it is a pity we must go to London."

"Well, Ellie," said Miss Lister, "we shall only remain there till after Twelfth Night, and there

will be a fortnight more for you then. I don't wish to go to London myself this year. But Mrs. Cresswell made a point of my being present at *her* parties."

"Aren't you going with us on Christmas Eve, then, Aunt Jessie?" asked Ellie.

"What, and leave Grandmama to spend Christmas Day alone? I could not do that!"

"Well, I'm sure it is a good thing we shall have you with us at those *grand* parties. I shall be very glad when they are over."

"Very sorry the next morning, Ellie; depend on it!" said Rose. "Aunt Jessie, what do you think of our going out after dinner, for Ellie to see the Park and pleasure-grounds? The Mansion she has already inspected."

"It will be too damp and cold this afternoon, my dears. Leave that till to-morrow, and be satisfied with the house for to-day."

The girls found no lack of occupation for the afternoon. The summons to the tea-table came before it was expected. Grandmama was already in her arm-chair by the fire, as they entered the room. A bright kettle was singing and steaming on the hob; and a brass "footman," supporting a pile of buttered toast, glittered in the blaze. The warm curtains, carefully drawn, threw a genial glow over the room; and the whole presented a pleasant picture.

When tea was removed, Rose opened the piano and played some of her best pieces. Her sister's execution excited both admiration and surprise on Ellie's part. She praised warmly, declaring that

there was not one among all the girls at the Rectory who could play half as well. She herself next followed with a more humble performance, and then Miss Lister and Rose sang together, or by turns, till, as the evening wore on, and bed-time approached, Aunt Jessie proposed that they should all sing a hymn together, before prayers, "to please Grandmama," whose trembling voice joined with theirs in the solemn harmony. Then they knelt in prayer.

There followed "the parting kiss and the kind good night;" and so ended Ellie's first day at Cowley.

CHAPTER XXV.

On the second morning after her arrival at Cowley, Ellie was sitting with her hand in Mrs. Lister's, while the breakfast things were being removed, telling her about the Rectory and her friends there, when Rose came skipping back into the room, which she had left after having hastily despatched her breakfast, saying,—

“Now, Grandmama, you must spare Ellie. I have some business for her upstairs. Please let her come now; and then, whenever you wish to have her again, she shall be at your command.”

“Yes, go, my dear. To-morrow we shall put aside business for a few hours, and then I can talk to you. I would have all occupations in their right place and time, Ellie. Besides, young girls must not be as grave as old women.”

“It is because to-morrow is Sunday, Grandmama, that I want to have her now. On Wednesday we go to London; and Aunt Jessie said that we must get all our things spread out for her to see that everything is as it should be, before we want to pack. I have done mine, and now I want Ellie to get hers.”

Ellie longed to stay without interruption and talk to Grandmama. She was not, however, wanting in interest on the subject of the toilette ; and she followed her sister to the bedroom. Rose displayed her visiting wardrobe, and then said,—

“ Our evening dresses for Mrs. Cresswell’s party are not sent home yet. They are something unique, I assure you.”

“ Tell me what they are, Rose ; and all about the Cresswells’ party, too.”

Rose described the dresses, winding up with, “ Is not that charming, pray ? ”

“ Very pretty, I should think. And what shall we do at the party ? ”

“ Dance, of course. The only thing that I do not like about it is —— ” and she hesitated.

“ Go on, Rose. What is it you don’t like ? Do tell me.”

“ Why, they always make me dance a *pas de trois* with two of Mr. Cresswell’s little girls ; and I can’t bear it.”

“ You, Rose—a great girl like you ! Why don’t you say you won’t do it ? ”

“ Aunt Jessie doesn’t like me to refuse. You see I learn dancing with these children, and know all they can do, and that makes me a great help. Aunt Jessie says that it is not worth making a fuss about. And Ellie, I can tell you that you and I will have to dance together, so prepare yourself.”

“ Oh, I would rather dance with you than with any one else, Rose.”

“ But I mean we shall have to perform some dance for the entertainment of the company. If

you know the minuet and gavotte, we must do that."

"Indeed, I shall do no such thing. I don't believe Mama would like it."

"You will find you must, I expect. It's the order of the day. But never mind. That is soon over; and all the rest is very pleasant."

"I do mind, though. And I would much rather not go."

"What! stay away, and lose the sight of Miss Cresswell in her evening wig! Such a beauty, Ellie, with two long white ostrich feathers drooping from the back of it. I'm sure it's worth going to the party for, only to see her go down a country dance."

"Miss Cresswell dance! That ugly old thing I saw at Grandmama's? I don't believe it, Rose."

"It's true. Why, so does Grandmama, the whole evening through. Nothing offends her more than to be left out."

"I never in my whole life heard anything so ridiculous. Those two old women dancing!"

"Be more respectful, Elspeth Woodford. Old *ladies* would have been a more proper term."

"And does Grandmama wear a wig with feathers in it?"

"No; but the gayest of caps, with flowers in every part. Miss Cresswell won't wear feathers again this winter, I suppose. There will be a change, of course—a wreath of roses, perhaps."

"Does Mrs. Cresswell dress herself in this ridiculous way?"

"Oh no, she would not like it. And Mr. Cresswell

makes great fun of his sister about her wig, and would pull it before everybody when she first wore it."

"Well, they seem queer people, I think," said Ellie.

"No, they are not. It's only Miss Cresswell who is queer."

"But Mr. and Mrs. Cresswell make you dance before a great roomful of people. I think that's worse than queer."

"Well, that can't last much longer. When little Mary can take her part with the others, they won't want *me*, you may depend on it."

"What does Grandmama Lister say to it all?"

"To my dancing with the two little Cresswells, do you mean?"

"No, about Grandmama Woodford's dancing, and being so gay."

"Never one word. That is what I think so good and nice of her; because we know what she must feel about it, she who never seems to have any thought at all about 'this present evil world,' as she calls it."

"She must be very happy, I think," said Ellie.

"Yes, she always does seem happy in one sense; and that kind of life for old people is, of course, more right than Grandmama Woodford's style of going on. But you needn't look in that wishful sort of way, Ellie; for it wouldn't be suitable for young girls like us to sit in our bedrooms, and read our Bibles all day."

"No, I know that. We might *like* the same things that Grandmama Lister does though, and so get happiness something like hers."

"I never met with any girl who really *liked* those things. We shall, of course, when we grow older, become serious, and like reading our Bibles and going to church."

"Then why doesn't Grandmama Woodford like it?"

"She is very particular about going to church, whether she likes it or not. And she reads her Bible, too, on Sunday. Indeed, somehow, that is always a solemn, dismal day there, and Grandpapa can't bear it. But here is Aunt Jessie; don't look so grave, Ellie. Think what a happy time we have before us now!"

Sunday morning was clear and bright. The hoar frost sparkled on the trees and grass. Light clouds floated high. The labouring world was at rest; and Nature had leisure for her silent worship.

Ellie stood half dressed, looking intently upward, watching through her window the faint outline of the moon amidst the soft surrounding blue.

"Ellie, what are you thinking about? If you don't mind, you will be late for breakfast," said Rose, who was hurrying on with her dressing.

"I was not thinking of anything worth telling, Rose. But I must make haste, for I want to go and see Grandmama. Do you think she will let me into her room this morning?"

"I dare say, if she's not down first herself, which seems not improbable."

Ellie's knock at Mrs. Lister's door was answered by an invitation to enter. Grandmama was standing by the table, dressed. She kissed Ellie tenderly, and then stroked her hair, saying:—

“ ‘Sweet is the day of sacred rest,
No earthly care shall seize my breast ;
Oh, may my heart in tune be found’———

Is my little Ellie’s heart in *tune* this day of rest ? ”

“ No, Grandmama. It never is in tune, if that means being good.”

“ I did not expect to hear that my little girl had a *good* heart.”

“ Well, Grandmama, it isn’t ‘new’ or ‘right’ either. It is as bad as it can be.”

“ ‘Ye will not come unto *Me* that ye might have life.’ Do you know who said that, Ellie ? ”

“ Yes, Grandmama.”

“ And do you think that He who said it would disappoint you if you really came to Him ; or that the ‘life’ He means is not the gift of a renewed heart, which you complain of not having ? Think of all the invitations in God’s Word to ask for this gift ; the promises that it shall not be denied, which that Word contains.”

“ Yes, I know ; and I think I have been helped to overcome temptations *sometimes*. But Grandmama, a really new heart loves God better than anything else, does it not ? ”

“ And Ellie feels that there are the mother, and Harry, and the beautiful home, all coming first in hers. She could not truly say that God has the first or the largest place there. Is it not so ? ”

“ Yes, Grandmama ; indeed it is.”

“ Well, there is only one remedy for that, darling. But it is a sure one. Take the whole tale to your heavenly Father. Tell Him exactly how it is, and that you know it should not be so ; and ask Him to

set the little chamber within in better order for you. Ask Him, Ellie, to show by His Spirit a glimpse of His love for you in that poor little heart of yours. That will do more to put earthly and heavenly affections each in their proper place there than anything else. But we must talk of this some other time, my dear child ; I am later now than is usual with me, and I love to have God's day all calmness—no hurry, even in the despatching of a meal."

There was but little conversation during the progress of breakfast. Ellie was still reflecting on what her Grandmama had said ; Rose was pleasing herself inwardly with the thought of the famous opportunity she should have of pointing out to Ellie the magnates of Cowley and its immediate neighbourhood, who would be sure all to be at church this lovely morning. Aunt Jessie had cogitations of her own.

Mrs. Lister did not leave the house during the winter. Having seen her comfortably established in her own room, Rose and Ellie took their way to church with Aunt Jessie.

There was nothing in the mode of conducting the service calculated to awaken serious thought. The soft, solemn strains, of a voluntary, beautifully played, produced something of devotional feeling for a moment in Ellie's mind. But, in a short time, her thoughts had wandered off—had reached Harry ; and she started from a waking dream as the sounds ceased. She made a few ineffectual struggles to escape from her thralldom, and then gave herself up to the fascination of her fancies.

All looked smiling and satisfied as they came out

of church, and Rose gave Ellie some whispered information about the people who passed. But the day had changed, and it was too cold to linger. The sunshine was gone. A keen north-east wind had taken the place of the morning stillness, and a brisk and almost silent walk home was the result.

"I have had a beautiful sermon here, Jessie," said Mrs. Lister, laying her hand on the book she had been reading, as aunt and nieces crowded round the fire in her room. "I should like you to read some parts of it, and those dear little maids too. 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord,' is the text."

"I'm sure we can't say we've had a good sermon, mother. I think Mr. Holmes gets worse and worse. I expect he will really go to sleep himself over his sermon some day. And he certainly makes other people wish to do so."

There was no reply to this remark, and the party separated till dinner; grandmama to "feed in her heart by faith with thanksgiving" on the rich provision of her Father's Word; the others to indulge their day-dreams, or settle their plans for the coming week, or, it may be, to experience yearnings for a portion of that food on which the eldest of the household was gaining strength to tread the short remaining pathway to eternal rest.

The weather had become so cheerless and threatening by the time dinner was over, that all thought of attending afternoon service was given up; and Rose and Ellie settled themselves together in the dining-parlour with Aunt Jessie, while Mrs. Lister retired as usual to her room.

In the evening, when tea had drawn the circle together again, Mrs. Lister inquired whether they had in the morning seen any of the members of a family in the town in which there had been a recent death.

"Such a shocking thing, Ellie," said Rose. "Poor Susan White, an acquaintance of ours, died of brain fever, and was only ill three days. We saw her pass on Wednesday with the gentleman to whom she was to have been married next spring, and then on the following Saturday we heard that she was dying."

"The parents could have borne to part with their child," said Mrs. Lister, "if they had been granted the blessing of a good hope that they should meet again in a better world. But it has been a hard and bitter trial that this was denied them."

"Grandmama, Susan was very pleasant and amiable, and good and dutiful to her parents, too, I'm sure," said Rose.

"Yes, my dear, yes. She was all that, and a very lovely girl. But this could not satisfy those who loved her, when they saw her stretched upon a dying bed, and all intellect gone. Even poor young Fairfield was in deep distress about this. He knew that the charms which had won him were not those which would secure her eternal happiness."

A deep silence followed this account. Each felt that it spoke loudly to herself, and to each came those resolves with which we soothe our pricking consciences from year to year. Reforms that are surely to be at some not far distant day! Tastes changed and flowing in quite other channels than now! "When I am older—really a woman—when

I *ought* to be grave," whispered Rose's young mirth-loving heart. "This next year I certainly will begin," was murmured uneasily through Aunt Jessie's maturer mind. "What a happy thing to be ready as Grandmama would be, if she were called away so unexpectedly! It is better, happier, to be ready, whether death comes suddenly or not!" said the youngest spirit in the circle, catching so quickly the desire for heavenly things, and turned as yet so soon from their pursuit!

CHAPTER XXVI.

BLEAK winds blew about the "square, comfortable house" all Sunday night.

When morning came again and showed the outer world, there stood old Winter, in a spotless robe, waiting to welcome Christmas.

The sun shone out upon that dazzling dress, and it sparkled, showing itself for miles around, even though only to be seen here among the flat pastures of Cowley.

"This really is delightful," said Rose, dancing into the room in her usual style when pleased or excited. "I don't think I can sit down to dinner! It is *food* enough to look out on this beautiful scene. If I could have chosen, it is just the weather I should have decided on for our first Christmas together, Ellie."

"But it will not look like this in London, Rose. How I wish we were going to stay at Cowley!"

"That is very ungrateful, and rather disagreeable of you, when I have been looking forward so long to the pleasure of going to London with you. Now, Aunt Jessie, do please to scold her; for I think it is bad behaviour on Ellie's part."

"It is quite needless, Rose. Wait till this day week. Ellie will get over her shyness, and enjoy all the gaiety as much as you could desire."

"Well, we shall see when you return whether there has been any change in Ellie's feelings," said Mrs. Lister.

"Ah, Grandmama! you want her to like Cowley best."

"I wish her to find out which *is* best, my little Rosie; a regular and quiet life or the excitement of gay society—to speak of nothing *higher* than quiet and regularity."

"Well, mother," said Miss Lister, rather sharply, "you must not expect too much of young girls. They all *do* like pleasure and excitement. If you look back some sixty years, I dare say you will confess it."

"I was not subjected to much excitement in my youth, my dear Jessie," said Mrs. Lister. "But I well remember their age in my own life, and the recollection does not help to make me think that even such as I ever did know was best. But we shall see. From Rose's account, there are materials preparing in London for their making full trial of a fortnight's dissipation, and I would not send them away with any cloud on their spirit, however I may desire that it should be distasteful to them."

The last part of this speech was uttered in so low a tone that no one heard it distinctly. Ellie tried to make out what it was, and she was the only one to whom it became clear, when, after a few moments' thought, the sounds which had fallen on her ear

shaped themselves into the words which had been spoken.

"I like Cowley, Rose," said Ellie, looking approvingly out of the coach window, as she settled herself for her journey to London, on the morning of Christmas-eve. "When we come back, I hope we shall be able to take some nice walks together."

"Yes, that we shall. I don't consider the few days you have been here anything—only just the introduction—the preface. The first page of the holidays we begin to-day, and it will be a delightful book from one end to the other."

"Rose," said Ellie, after a somewhat lengthy silence, and with rather a rueful expression of countenance, "What does Grandmama Woodford call you?"

"Posey—always," replied her sister, laughing. "What makes you ask? and with that miserable face, too!"

"Why, she always will call me *Elspy*, and that's one of the things I never can bear! Why can't she call us by our proper names, like other people?"

"What does it signify, you little silly thing? I see you don't understand Grandmama Woodford a bit. To call things and people by a wrong name is one of her fancies, and the best way is to laugh at it."

Manchester Place was reached, and old Mrs. Woodford, dressed in broadest smiles, appeared at the door to welcome her grandchildren.

"Well, girls, how are you? Christmas here at last," and she gave a hearty laugh—an habitual

manner of closing her speeches, classed by Ellie with the miscalled names.

"What was there to laugh at in that?" she said to herself, in no very amiable state of feeling; while Rose joined in the laugh, and looked as if she meant that nothing should interfere with her enjoyment.

"Now don't you call this *perfect* Christmas weather, Grandmama?" said Rose, rubbing her hands before the blazing fire. "It's just what Christmas used to be when *you* were young, isn't it? for that's what you always say when anything is particularly delightful. But, tell me, now, what time do the Strachans dine to-morrow, Grandmama?"

"Oh, when did you ever know any change in that house, Miss Posey? Mr. Strachan has dined at three o'clock ever since he could hold a knife and fork, I venture to say. It would be death to him, I suppose, to make it a quarter past. But don't stand about with your bonnets on. Dear me, I forgot," she added, glancing at the mantelshelf, "here's a letter for Elspy."

"Is there?" said Ellie, with sudden animation. "Thank you, Grandmama."

Ellie held the letter in her hand a moment, looking at the direction and postmark.

"Is it from Harry?" asked Rose.

"I hope so. The postmark is right, but I don't know the writing."

"Well, open it and see whose it is, you little goose," said Mrs. Woodford, closing with the accustomed laugh, which grated sorely against Ellie's temper.

She obeyed without reply, however, and glancing

at the end of the closely written sheet, she uttered a loud "Oh !" and the flushing cheek and kindling eye bore testimony to the surprise and pleasure the discovery of the writer's name had produced.

"Well, Ellie, we should like to know who is the writer of this epistle," said Rose.

"It is from Harry ; only Percy had gone to Ferndale for a few days, and just while he was there Harry got my letter, and Percy offered to answer it. Wasn't it kind of him ? Only think, all this !" and she held out the sheet triumphantly.

"And pray who may '*Percy*' be, Miss Elspy ?" inquired Mrs. Woodford, affecting ignorance.

"Harry's eldest brother, Grandmama. That gentleman you saw with Dr. and Mrs. Forrester when I came to London." Rose perceived by her sister's face, and the tone in which her Grandmama had spoken, that the sooner this dialogue was brought to a close the better. She therefore said,—

"Now, Ellie, I will be patient for a quarter of an hour by Grandmama's watch. Go upstairs into the bedroom and enjoy your letter. I shall come up presently and expect a share in the treat. Be-gone !" she added playfully, "you know your way ? The bedroom on your left-hand up the next flight of stairs."

The letter was in the old style of intercourse which had been interrupted for so many months, and wholly dispelled Ellie's fears that "my own little brother" was changed.

The concluding paragraph was on this wise,—

"Thus far, Ellie, my pen has moved strictly at "Harry's direction ; sometimes rather uneasily ;

“when compelled to write his warm-hearted effusions about his ‘brother Percy.’ This you will understand, I am sure. Now I have begged a corner whereon to tell you the pleasure it gave me to find in Harry’s friend the little girl I had met at Smith’s Farm. Many times since then I have thought of that meeting. In our next interview, when both had looked upon six years more of life, you were again in sorrow, and the part of comforter seemed again to rest with me. I wish it could have been more perfectly sustained.

“Your charge concerning Harry I have done my best to fulfil; as well for the sake of the pleading look with which it was given, as for my love of the dear boy who bears his affliction with so much patience. I will not fail in this my part till, if such be God’s permission, I resign my place once more to you. For the sake of both I trust the day will come when Ellie will resume this charge. But even her short life has read some lessons designed to teach her not to depend or set her heart on any earth-bound hope. May all peace and joy be with her. She must not forget that she has an old as well as a new friend in

“PERCY FORRESTER.”

Ellie’s face showed Rose, as she entered the room, the conflicting feelings which the perusal of the letter had raised. Rose’s own wish to take her turn was stimulated.

“You cannot like it as much as I do, Rose,” said Ellie, holding out the sheet. “But I think you *will* like it——”

The letter was hardly finished, when there was a knock at the door.

Mr. Woodford had returned, and wished to see the young ladies. A prolonged sitting at the drawing-room window to watch the passers-by followed, and lasted till dinner was served.

"Well, Ellie," said Mr. Woodford as they sat at table, "I'm glad to see your cheeks not so white as they were the last time you were here."

"She's had a letter since she came this morning, which has put a little colour into them," said Mrs. Woodford.

"From Harry Forrester, Grandpapa," said Ellie.

"Some young admirer of yours?" he replied with an inquiring face and a formal bow. Provokingly following the course his wife had taken in the morning, he affected ignorance, and looked as if he had never heard the name before.

"He's no such thing! He's my own little brother."

The burning tears rushed to Ellie's eyes, and in spite of herself some rolled down her now crimsoned cheek. Grandpapa smiled, and winked at Rose. She, sorely perplexed how to keep matters smooth, abruptly turned the subject from the Forresters by asking Mr. Woodford who he thought would be at the Strachans' the next day.

"Cousin Archie—no one else but ourselves, depend on it. Now, Rose, you're getting a great girl. There's Cousin Archie a rich old bachelor. Set *your* cap at him!"

"Oh, Grandpapa," said Rose, resolved to show Ellie how such jokes should be received. "Cousin

Archie can't bear anything under fifty. I'm not quite *that* yet, you know."

"Oh, we can't tell. If you set to work in the right way it's not unlikely he might be brought round."

They chatted on for some time in the same strain, leaving Ellie to recover herself, who sat feeling much ashamed at the temper she had shown. Before long a timid remark now and then proved that she wished to forget the affront. Mr. Woodford, who was kind-hearted despite his rough jokes, caught at her attempts to get right, and soon they talked and laughed together, without again running foul of the Forresters.

After a late and merry breakfast the next day, Mrs. Woodford and her two granddaughters hastened to church. It was "right," she said, to go on Christmas morning; and therefore, although it was a scramble to get there after their tardy rising, to church they went, and Grandmama's conscience had peace through this commendable exertion.

Duly at a quarter to three of the clock, post meridian, Ellie, Rose, and their grandparents appeared in the drawing-room of Mr. Strachan's house in Bedford-square. He was Mr. Woodford's brother-in-law, an irascible old Scotchman, possessing a kind and generous heart, and a temper which burst into a blaze twenty times a day on the smallest provocation; or provocation failing, it took refuge for explosion in the game of backgammon after tea. He had been a widower for many years. His son Robert, having long ago lost a young wife, now lived at home with his father. Eliza, the daughter of

another son living in India, was committed to her grandfather's care for her educational years.

To this small circle of stranger relatives Ellie, the only novelty of the day, was duly introduced. Mr. Strachan received her kindly, but remarked in his broad Scotch accent, that "she ought to go to the Highlands to get a little colour in her cheeks." Eliza kissed her affectionately. Cousin Robert took the young stranger by the hand, sat down with her on the sofa, and engaged her in conversation till dinner was announced.

"Cousin Archie" (a nephew of Mr. Strachan's) got over the introduction as fast as decency would permit, and then located himself between Mr. Woodford and his uncle.

That evening established a friendship between Ellie and her cousin Robert which made her visit to Bedford-square altogether a different thing from the stiff and gloomy time she had pictured to herself beforehand. Rose and Eliza pursued their own objects of interest together. The mornings were passed by the three girls in sight-seeing under Robert's escort. The evenings in pleasant converse, music, work, and reading. Ellie acknowledged to herself that if the whole fortnight of absence from Cowley should pass as the days were now passing, she would not feel the regret she had at first expressed at leaving it.

Time hurried on, and brought the sisters to the last day of their uneventful but pleasant visit to their great uncle.

"I am sorry to go away, Cousin Robert," said Ellie, as she folded up her work and prepared to



help Rose with the packing on the morning of their departure. "I wish I might stay here instead of going to Grandmama's again."

"I think you cannot be more sorry than I am, Ellie. You have been quite a little daughter to me. But you are going to be very gay, are you not? That will be pleasant to you, I suppose?"

"Oh, I can't bear the thought of it. Now *this* is just the kind of life I like. I do like the *country* best certainly. But I mean you all go on in such a *pleasant* way, and *you* are so kind."

"Well, if you will come and see us again, I think I may promise that we will 'go on' in the same way. I am sure I may promise to be as kind as you consider I have been on this occasion. My little cousin seemed to creep into a warm place in my heart directly. But the dearest friends must part, Ellie. And now there is just the packing up and the farewells, and then this pleasant page of my life is turned over. But I shall expect you to remember me, mind that!"

"Indeed I shall. I shall shut you up in a little room in my heart where I keep those I like best."

"Thank you. I suppose I can make a pretty good guess as to who will be my companions in that same little room? I shall inquire into this the next time we meet, remember; and be very jealous if I have not been allowed comfortable space there!"

Eliza's large dark eyes were filled with tears as she bid adieu to her young friends, and it was on all sides a parting full of regret.

Regret, however, was unavailing. Rose and

Ellie had promised to be at Manchester-place by two o'clock at the latest, and one had already struck. So with reiterated farewells they were put into the hackney-coach by Cousin Robert ; the whip sounded——

And they were driven away to *different* scenes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

As the girls drove to Manchester-place, Rose lectured her sister on the duty of patience towards Mr. and Mrs. Woodford.

Ellie listened in silence, but made mental resolves to imitate Rose's example as much as in her lay. And, happen what would, she determined not to allow her temper to show itself as it had done on a former occasion.

Wherefore, when they arrived at Mrs. Woodford's door, and Grandmama, after a hasty greeting, told Rose to go upstairs and take off her out-of-door dress as quickly as possible, for that she wanted to consult her on several matters, Ellie put in a petition to be allowed to come and give her opinion as well.

"Oh! yes, surely. Three heads will be better than two, no doubt," was graciously replied.

Curious to know what was to be the nature of this consultation, the girls hastily cast off their walking dresses, and hurried into Mrs. Woodford's bedroom. Here they found a bright fire blazing, and pervading odours of cedar-wood and lavender.

Hung round about the room were a variety of

dresses of different hues. Pasteboard boxes of a millinery stamp, and miscellaneous articles of full-dress intention, occupied most of the intervening spaces.

"Now, girls," said Mrs. Woodford, "I want you to help me to fix on what I shall wear to-morrow evening. It's to be a very large party, and we must all look our best. So just help me to decide which of all these dresses I shall wear. This is my last new one ; how do you like it ?"

And she displayed a bright and rich blue silk, elaborately ornamented with little stars of glittering steel, and a belt with buckle to match.

After having been shown several others, some even more inappropriate, Rose saw she must agree to this glittering robe, though she longed to take a pair of scissors and snip off all the stars, and to remove the gay buckle from the girdle. It would, however, have been high treason to utter such wishes. So the blue-and-steel was decided on for Penley Lodge ; and Rose could only put in a petition that a despised Esterhazy—the only dress which looked suitable for a Grandmama—might be worn at Miss Cresswell's that evening.

Then began a rummaging amongst the pasteboard boxes.

"Here's the cap, girls," said the old lady, taking from one of these receptacles (with evident satisfaction) an elaborate head-dress, trimmed with gay ribbons, and long, quivering sprays of white feather, decorated with mock pearls—altogether a very fine and somewhat tawdry affair.

Ellie, in despair, looked at Rose to see how she would deal with this new difficulty.

Rose took the cap in her hand, and examined it without allowing her countenance to be an index to her thoughts.

"Well, Posey, and what do you say to it?" inquired Mrs. Woodford.

"The lace is handsome, Grandmama. But I was thinking that something all white would look better with your blue dress."

"Oh! my compliments to you, Ma'm'selle! Why, there was I, trapesing about from Dan to Běshěby one whole morning, to get something that I thought pretty for Mrs. Cresswell's party! I didn't see anything, though, that I liked so well as this. They asked me a fine price for it; but I was determined to get it for less. I was there haggling over it till I was tired, if the people weren't."

"I'm glad I was not with you, Grandmama."

"Ah, ah, ah! and so am I. I shouldn't have got my cap for what I did if you had been."

"And you think of wearing this to-morrow night with the blue dress, Grandmama?"

"Yes, to be sure I do. Why should I be dressed up as brown as a wren, and as old as Methusalem, while all you young ones are gadding about in smart colours? Now, here's one more thing to settle;—which of the wigs will suit the cap best?"

Ellie looked on in mute astonishment. To Rose the scene presented no novelty.

At length it was settled that golden tresses would set off the new purchase to the best advantage. Then, laying dress, cap, and wig on the bed together in the positions they would eventually take, the lady took an anticipatory glance at the effect, and pro-

ceeded to select minor decorations which would bring the *tout ensemble* into perfect accordance with her wishes.

"I wonder Grandmama isn't ashamed," Ellie began, as soon as the girls got back to their own room, "to wear such ridiculous clothes."

"They look more ridiculous to you, Ellie, than they really are, because you have never been out to parties, and you don't know how people dress."

"But I'm sure *old* people, at all events, ought not to be dressed fine. And I don't think they ought to like going to parties."

"Now, Ellie, take care! I once fancied *I* was going to work great reforms in these matters. I thought, with all my influence, I should get Grandmama Woodford to be like Grandmama Lister. But *that* was when I was as young as you are, Miss Ellie, and I have given it up for some time. Well, now for this dreadful evening! Oh, how glad I shall be when I hear Miss Cresswell saying, 'Good night, my dear creatures. I know you haven't enjoyed yourselves a bit.' Of course, Ellie, you are aware that when you hear that, it will be incumbent on you to declare that you never in your whole life passed so pleasant an evening before."

"But you say it will *not* be pleasant, Rose?"

"Pleasant! I should think not. But then society requires politeness. So prepare your speech beforehand; it will be sure to be wanted."

Dull without mitigation Miss Cresswell's party truly was. Ellie declared that if the rest of the "festivities" were to be like that evening, she really could not have anything more to do with them.

It was with no little surprise, that, waking out of a heavy slumber the next morning, Ellie's eyes opened on full daylight, and she found that the sounds which had aroused her were produced by a servant bringing in a well-filled tray which contained breakfast for both herself and Rose.

"Breakfast in bed!" she exclaimed; "is this part of it all, Rose? And what time is it, I wonder?"

"Yes, it is 'part of it all,' and a necessary part you'll find it, after a few days' dissipation. Ann will tell us what time it is."

"Half-past ten, Miss."

"Half-past ten! Why, we shall hardly be dressed before Aunt Jessie comes!"

"Who will not make her appearance till nearly one o'clock. You intend being deliberate, it seems, Ellie. But, at all events, enjoy this delicious breakfast now. I'm for making the most of everything."

The morning passed much as the previous one had done. There were discussions about dress, a long visit from Miss Cresswell, the arrival of Aunt Jessie, and the still fresh amusement of watching the passers in the busy thoroughfare.

Dressing-time arrived. There was not one of the circle in Manchester-place who did not cast looks of solicitude into every mirror she came near. Even to the last moment Mrs. Woodford was not satisfied that she had done all that might have been done to produce the effect she desired.

Rose and Ellie contented even Miss Lister's critical eye by the elegant simplicity of their white dresses. They wore no ornament but their long, rich curls.

Aunt Jessie swept into Mrs. Cresswell's drawing-room, followed by the two girls, priding herself on the thought that they were not likely to be eclipsed. Ellie would have exclaimed aloud, as the door of the reception-room was thrown open, had not Rose given her a pinch which reminded her of proprieties. At that moment, a tall, lady-like looking woman, and three little girls—the latter bounding across the room as they caught sight of Rose—came forward to greet them.

Mrs. Cresswell led the sisters to seats at the further end of the room, recommended the stranger to the care of her girls, and then left Ellie at leisure to look on the scene around her.

It was a large and antique room, hung from ceiling to floor with tapestry, and now tastefully decorated with evergreens interspersed with coloured lamps. The ceiling and cornices were richly ornamented with elaborate and quaint devices, and the chimney-piece was so high that a servant was obliged to stand on a chair to make some re-arrangement of the lights placed on it. From a small room which opened into this charming saloon, trays of tea and coffee were issuing; and round and about, wherever the eye fell, were twos and threes of children or young girls, all dressed in white. Miss Cresswell, in amber silk, and the youthful-looking wig, was a prominent object.

After a while the issue of trays from the tea-room gradually slackened—then ceased. A movement amongst the company, a general drawing on of gloves, and the entrance of the musicians, told that dancing was about to begin. Mrs. Cresswell, at

this juncture, went up to Miss Lister; and a whispered dialogue ensued, which ended in Rose being summoned to her Aunt's side, and joining in it for a few seconds. Ellie watched her sister closely. She observed that a slight cloud passed over Rose's face, and guessed that the dance with the little Cresswells was being proposed. How would she bear to do it before all these people?

Ellie saw her sister take a hand of each of Mrs. Cresswell's two elder children, give a few words of direction to the musicians, and then, the whole centre of the room being cleared, the dreaded *Pas de trois* was executed. General dancing followed; and as quadrilles were then modern innovations, not attainable by the elders, Mrs. Cresswell proposed a country dance. All the guests, accordingly, old and young, began selecting partners. When full justice had been done to the country dance, the younger visitors were called on in turn for a "figure dance," and this order of things was continued throughout the evening.

At last Mrs. Cresswell asked Miss Lister whether her younger niece would not take her part in the entertainment of the evening, and dance either alone or with her sister.

"I really know nothing of Ellie's powers," said Miss Lister. "But she will of course do her best if you wish it."

"Pray don't let me, Aunt Jessie," said Ellie in whispered accents of entreaty, and with difficulty repressing the rising tears.

Miss Lister affected neither to hear or see, but beckoning to Rose, she said,—

"Mrs. Cresswell wishes Ellie to dance. Just see if you and she can do something together."

Rose observed her sister's distressed face ; and taking her aside, as if to consult about the dance, she whispered,—

"Ellie, it *must* be done you see. Now take my advice. Don't think of the people. Just fancy yourself at the Rectory, and all this crowd, the girls there. That's what I do ; and after the first minute I never mind it at all. No one has done the minuet and gavotte. That will be sure to please, and of course you can do it. Come." And again giving her directions to the band, Rose led Ellie to her place, where she tried to follow her sister's suggestion, and to see only her school companions in that galaxy of faces round about her. The plan, as Rose had predicted, was successful. Ellie soon forgot her timidity, and did her best.

Her dancing Ellie had always thoroughly enjoyed. Even at Stockington and Wilton, with only such instruction as she could pick up in the twilight from her mother, she had acquired considerable facility. Her six months' practice under a regular master at the Rectory had tutored her light figure into decided grace and agility. But of this Ellie as yet had never thought. Simple enjoyment of the exercise was the feeling with which she had hitherto looked forward to her dancing lessons. It remained to the crowd around her to strip this taste of its simplicity, and to invest it with a new and dangerous interest.

The execution of the minuet was charming ; and when the young performers gracefully exchanged its stately movements for the light and airy mazes

of the gavotte, a murmur of admiration ran round the room, and failed not to reach the ears of the two dancers.

Ellie's head must have been stronger, her love of applause much weaker, had she stood, unmoved, the torrent of applause which surrounded herself and her sister as the last curtsey closed. A crowd hemmed them in, and Ellie heard for the first time of her charming figure, her graceful movements, and the perfect execution of her steps.

The poison worked rapidly. Never had Ellie before heard such praise applied to herself. Intoxicated with excitement and delight, she stood with flushed cheek and sparkling eye chatting to whoever addressed her.

A gaily-dressed lady soon came to her side with a fresh volley of compliments. She said that Miss Lister had promised to bring her nieces to a dancing-party at her house the next week, and she hoped the Miss Woodfords would allow her to consider the minuet as a part of the evening's programme. Ellie no sooner heard the compliments and the engagement, than forgetting Cowley and Grand-mama Lister, she thanked Mrs. Partington enthusiastically for her kind invitation, and said she would be delighted to do the minuet, or anything else she knew that the lady might wish to have.

For the rest of the evening Rose and Ellie were sought on all sides as partners, and each one had something flattering to say about the minuet. Ellie danced away, and never thought of weariness. By the time our little party reached Manchester-place, the first movements of another day were beginning

to make themselves heard, and the watchmen (Ellie's childish terrors) were reminding whosoever chanced to be abroad or awake, that it was "half-past three o'clock, and a frosty morning."

While Ellie was allowing herself to be entranced by the compliments paid to her dancing, Mrs. Cresswell and Miss Lister had been concerting fresh plans for dissipation.

Mr. Cresswell wanted his little girls to see a new pantomime, and his wife and Aunt Jessie arranged together that their parties should join forces for that purpose on Saturday evening. No great amount of persuasion was needed to induce Mr. and Mrs. Woodford to add *their* society also, and on Saturday evening, accordingly, all met at the theatre.

Ellie being the only one of the number to whom this amusement was new, was, in consequence, an object of general interest. Each of the others wished to observe the effect of the scene on the mind of a young girl just fresh from the country. Her exclamations of delight satisfied Rose and amused the elders, who could hardly remember the time when their own feelings were in like freshness, so long ago it seemed to some of them.

When all was over, Ellie was in a state of such bewildered excitement that her aunt had several times to draw her attention to the fact that they were going home. She could even then hardly recal her senses enough to follow the example of the others, and collect and put on her wraps.

"Oh, Rose! how delightful it has been! What a pity it is so soon over! I could sit down and

watch it all over again now. I'm so sorry there's no more."

"Why, it's Sunday morning, Miss Elspy. I suppose you don't want more to-day?"

"Sunday morning! Oh, no, Grandmama, I hope not," replied Ellie, as much shocked as her present overwrought state would permit. "It can't be that, I think?"

"Look here, Miss Unbelieving!" said the old lady, holding out her watch. "What do you call that?"

Ellie saw, indeed, that midnight was passed by several minutes. "But look," Mrs. Woodford added, "there's Mr. and Mrs. Cresswell going. Make haste, or we shall all get separated."

The minute hand made another circle of the clock on Sunday morning before Rose and Ellie shut themselves into their bedroom. Both were too tired, now that the excitement was over, to think of anything but of hurrying into bed as quickly as possible. At first the sounds of music rang in their ears, and they started from restless and broken slumbers. But later in the morning fatigue prevailed, and they fell into the tranquil repose of youth, nor opened their eyes again till the winter sun was streaming brightly through the crevices round their blinds.

"It's strange we've not been called," said Rose, rubbing her eyes, as she looked towards the window. "Just see, Ellie, how the sun is shining; it must be late. I think we had better ring."

This being done, the maid gave information that it was about eleven o'clock; that Miss Lister was tired, and was going to take her breakfast in bed;

that Mrs. Woodford was just going down, and would send up theirs in a few minutes ; and that Mr. Woodford had been gone out some time.

"I daresay he's gone to church all alone," said Ellie.

"It will be something new if he *has*. I never heard of his going there in my life yet."

"Do you mean to say, Rose, that he never goes anywhere at all?"

"I mean that he never goes to church or any place of the kind."

"How shocking! What does Grandmama say about it?"

"I don't believe she ever says *anything* about it. She's too wise."

"And when shall we go to church to-day, Rose? It's past time for the morning service now."

"We shall not go at all to-day, I dare say. They always dine at two o'clock on Sunday, and I'm sure Grandmama wouldn't move directly after dinner. It's no great loss. I can't bear this church."

Ellie thought with dread of the dreary day before her, besides having, even in her present dissipated state of mind, many misgivings about the way in which it was likely to be spent. But feeling weary and irritable, and Rose's tones of voice being neither as cheerful, nor her manner as kind as usual, she said no more, and the girls ate their breakfast and dressed almost in silence.

When at last they reached the drawing-room, they found Mrs. Woodford seated by the fire, looking steadfastly into the blaze, and holding a large book on her lap. Miss Lister was sitting at the

window, resting her chin on one hand, while in the other she held her open prayer-book, which might be supposed to share her attention by turns with scenes outside the house.

Rose at once seized the seat opposite her aunt, and Ellie took her place at the table, and opening a heavy volume which lay upon it, found it to be the old "Book of Martyrs," which she and Harry had so often studied together in those happy days at Smith's Farm.

The others made several attempts with their books; but each soon gave up the reading, and stared into the fire or out into the road till Mr. Woodford returned. With his coming, dinner was announced.

The rest of the day was dragged through in a similar way. In the evening, Rose was requested to read a chapter in the Bible. When this was over, Mr. Woodford recommended that all should go to bed early that they might recover effectually from their late fatigue, and be ready for that which was in prospect.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ELLIE had now fairly entered on the life of gaiety to which she had looked forward with so much dread from the retirement of Cowley.

Gaiety was not distasteful now. The only wearisome part was the intervening days, which seemed so long and dull, and in which she could settle to nothing.

Twelfth-day came. It was to have been the last of dissipation, that immediately preceding the once-longed-for return to a quiet life. But the promise made to Mrs. Partington would now delay this return for several days, and how to get over these till the delightful evening of the party should arrive occupied Ellie's thoughts more than any regret on account of the postponed return.

She had gone one morning alone into the dining-parlour, that she might write a long letter to Harry. She sat down, intending to give him a description of her gay doings, prospective and past. The paper was before her, and the pen in her hand, when Rose darted into the room, her eyes sparkling, her cheek flushed, and an open note in her hand.

"Another invitation, Ellie! another dance! What

do you think of *this* for a gay Christmas ? Hurrah for the minuet, say I ! For I believe that is at the bottom of it."

"But are we going, Rose ?" said Ellie, starting up, with a brightening face. "Who has invited us ? and when is the party ?"

"Next Tuesday is the day, and Mrs. Selwyn the inviter."

"Mrs. Selwyn ? I never heard of such a person. Who is she ?"

"Oh ! we know her, and I have been to one party there. She was at the Cresswells—a little woman in a large cap."

"But *Tuesday*, Rose—next week ? And if it had not been for Mrs. Partington's dance we should have gone home to-morrow."

"Yes, so we should ; and I'm rather surprised at Aunt Jessie's yielding, I must say. But the invitation is pressing, and Grandmama won't hear of our not going ; *entre nous*, I fancy that Aunt Jessie enjoys this gaiety as much as we do. By-the-bye, Ellie, you and I must get up some new dance together. I should not like to seem able to do nothing but the minuet. We will have a good practice when you have done your letter." So saying, Rose danced out of the room, humming the tune of the gavotte, leaving Ellie to continue her writing.

But Ellie soon found she was in no mood for writing ; and at last, half angry, she gave up the attempt. Harry wouldn't care to hear of all these gaieties. How could he take any interest in what he knew nothing about ? The people, too, were all strangers to him —

But so had been the Strachans !—yet every incident of *that* week had been faithfully chronicled, and sent to Harry. Ellie remembered this, as she put aside the writing materials ; and though only half understanding the cause of her present reluctance, she felt considerable uneasiness at its existence, and resolved to write a long letter the next morning.

There was to be a large juvenile party at Mrs. Cresswell's that night. Tea precisely at five, that the young people might have a long evening without being late. A crowd of youthful visitors met in the tapestried chamber again. The scene was as charming as on the former occasion. The amusements provided were abundant and attractive. The intercourse among the guests was perfectly unconstrained. But there was wanting the stimulant of which Ellie had begun to taste, and, lacking which, all seemed flat and uninteresting. This time she felt neither reluctance nor regret when summoned to return home.

During the next morning Ellie contrived to slip away alone, that she might write to Harry. But the vapid, disconnected letter which her pen produced was a strange contrast to that which had been written from Cowley, and she felt it to be so. Vexed with herself, yet drawn by her vanity to long for the very thing which gave her so much uneasiness, she put her letter into the servant's hand, divided between the wish that she were going that day back to Grandmama Lister, and the yet stronger desire to join the coming gaieties, and win again such admiration as had been before so unexpectedly bestowed on her.

Thus tormented by her inward conflict, her countenance betrayed so much uneasiness, that, as she took her place at the dinner-table, Rose laughingly asked her whether "writing to Harry was such a serious business as that."

"As *what*, Rose?" she inquired, pettishly.

"As your face would lead us to suppose. You look as if you could not decide whether to smile or to cry. Now, I vote for the smile, and I mean to have it, too."

"Smile, indeed! I should think so," said Mrs. Woodford. "There are not many girls of your age, Miss Elspy, who will be able to go back to school and tell of having been to half-a-dozen grand parties besides the play."

Still Ellie did not smile.

"Does Rose care about being admired, I wonder?" she thought. "I dare say not. She is so used to it. No one ever told me I did anything really nicely before. And now, when I had never thought of being praised about my dancing, for people to think so much of it! I'm sure there can be nothing wrong in liking it — and yet I feel so miserable!"

"Not one more grave look will I allow you, Ellie. Come with me after dinner you certainly shall. A good practice of our dancing will drive away these dismal thoughts which seem to be haunting you. I intend that we shall be more popular than ever at Madame Selwyn's *soirée dansante*. I have a most charming *pas de deux* in my remembrance now, and in that I intend the Miss Woodfords shall shine on this occasion."

The evening on which so many anticipations were fixed drew tardily on, and became the "*now*" at last. We need not dwell on it, for there is little variety in these scenes. Mrs. Partington's gay assembly bore on it no new feature. Ellie's vanity was abundantly gratified. Admiration and applause were generously bestowed. The largest desire could hardly have called for more.

With a head throbbing from the effects of excitement and fatigue, she lay down to rest—too wearied and distracted to think of prayer. Sensible, perhaps, how ill it would accord with the thoughts now most prominent in her mind, she left even the outward form, and slept till the working world had half completed another day's task.

She woke to those sensations of weary sadness which often follow the excitement of dissipation. A sense of the brevity of the pleasure, keen regret that it was over, were the first feelings which oppressed her mind as her eyes opened at midday. She lay vacantly gazing about the room on one article after another of the dress she had worn the previous evening, recalling the scene in which she had acted a part as yet so new to her ; wondering, meanwhile, whether Mrs. Selwyn's party would be as charming, and seem so quickly gone, and how she would feel when there was really not one more to come.

As Ellie lay thus—even while she saw herself in imagination surrounded by the gay crowd, and heard the flattery repeated which had been so welcome to her ear—some words of a hymn which she had often repeated at Sarah's side in the dear

old home at Wilton came so imperatively to her memory, that she started as if they had been pronounced aloud in her ear :—

“ Weeks, months, and years are rolling by,
And soon will all be gone ;
For, day by day, as minutes fly,
Eternity comes on.”

Like the solemn tolling of a bell, telling of a spirit passed from earth, and calling on the living to hearken and consider, came those words to Ellie's mind.

She clasped her hands, and listened, as if half expecting to hear them really uttered.

Old truths, in simplest language ! Why did they move her thus ?

“ The wind bloweth where it listeth ; and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

They seemed to say, How empty, profitless, this life she was leading ! how brief the pleasure it could give ! how near the time when all would have passed away for ever ! But, most of all (ah ! there was the saddest thought now), how dishonoured in it all that patient Friend above, who had been so long waiting to win her heart's best worship, and to make her happy and blessed in Himself !

Rose still slept, and Ellie did not move. Whether the time was long, as we count moments, she never knew. But there went on then the new and wondrous communion between earth and heaven, at which angels rejoice, and spirits of evil tremble.

In silence the morning meal and lingering

toilette were completed. Rose looked with astonishment on her sister's face—that eager, excited face on which she had imprinted the last night's kiss—now lighted up with an expression never seen there before.

Rose pondered wearily, half angry at the peace and joy which shone in Ellie's eye.

"She's thinking of Mrs. Selwyn's party! It *must* be that. After all, she doesn't get as tired as I do with this dissipation."

The great turning-point in Ellie's history was reached now. With faith and prayer, through all those years at Wilton, the little earthen vessel had been "filled with water," and left in the mighty "Master's" hand, that He might work the miracle at His will.

And now, when all seemed most adverse to the change, the work was accomplished. The water had become wine.

Wonderful it was to Ellie herself to find old precepts rising to her mind, newly clothed with meanings deep and strange; to feel that such gay scenes as those in which she had been joining with so keen a relish, only made her tremble now; and that when they were passed by, those moments on her knees in her bedroom seemed like shelter and safety when danger had been very near. When Ellie dwelt on such a change as this, she could not doubt whose Loving Hand it was which had been outstretched in her behalf.

Mrs. Selwyn's party was succeeded by new engagements, and the holidays were over before their claims allowed of a return to Cowley. Miss

Lister and Rose looked on in wonder at Ellie's altered manner in these scenes; and Grandmama Woodford pronounced her "the strangest girl she had ever met with." And the old lady tried hard to fathom her reason for avoiding, as she now clearly did, the praise and admiration which she had as evidently courted before.

A few days of rest in the quiet home at Cowley—though they trenched on the half-year, and made Ellie behind time in her return to the Rectory—served to restore the elasticity which late hours and incessant gaiety had subdued. They gave opportunity, also, for unfolding to Grandmama the change which had taken place in her thoughts and desires while in London, and for receiving the counsel and encouragement which the aged saint was so well fitted to impart. These Ellie hid safely in her heart for future need.

A sombre morning, late in January, saw her seated once more in the old coach, her face set towards the Rectory.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ELLIE was received in the pink parlour by Miss Janet with the admonitory question,—

“Why, Elspeth! how is it you are so late in your return? Why does not Miss Clara’s god-daughter set a better example?”

Ellie explained, and excused herself.

“Well, you must get to work with double diligence,” said the lady; “that is all that can be done now.”

“I really mean to do my *best*, Ma’am!” Ellie replied, in a tone which caused Miss Janet to raise her eyes from her occupation to the speaker’s face.

“Then you ‘really’ will do *well*, my dear —” she said, allowing her eye to rest on Ellie, and looking much pleased. “Only do not get tired, and give up the good resolution!”

A more clamorous greeting awaited Ellie in the schoolroom, where she was surrounded by her own especial friends, who all began attempting to kiss her at once, each asking a different question, and all talking together.

“You are a little truant, Ellie!” said Annie

Arnold, when the hubbub had somewhat subsided ;
 “ and, as a punishment to you for not coming back
 sooner, or a reward for coming back at all—which-
 ever way you like to take it—we mean to make you
 tell us everything you have done in the holidays ;
 not a sketch only, but a real account of every
 day. And, first of all, have you seen Harry
 Forrester ? ”

“ Oh no, Annie ! I didn’t expect that.”

“ Nor Percy ? ”

“ No. I’ve been at Aunt Jessie’s and in London
 all the time.”

“ And to any parties, Ellie ? ” inquired Lina
 Willett.

“ Yes ; indeed I have—till I was quite tired of
 them ! ”

“ Famous ! ” said Annie. “ So have we—not till
 we were tired of them though. So, between all our
 gay doings, we shall have enough to talk about till
 they come round again.”

“ Oh, Annie, I want to be *diligent* this half-year.
 I—”

“ Ah, that is fine ! ” said a tall girl, who passed
 at the moment, and caught Ellie’s last words.
 “ Juniors,” she continued in a loud voice, “ I beg to
 announce to you that Miss Elspeth Clara Woodford
 is about to become *diligent* ! It’s necessary that any
 of you who may be intending to try for the second
 prize should understand the formidable rival you are
 likely to have ! ”

Ellie’s cheek flushed. A reply was on her lips,
 but Phoebe Willett whispered,—

“ Never mind her, Ellie ! You know Miss Jarvis

always says disagreeable things. *I* am very glad to hear it. It's just what I was intending myself; so we can help and encourage each other."

Many weeks had not passed away before the whole community in Milford Rectory bore testimony to the change in Ellie's habits. Miss Clara's manner towards her became quite affectionate. Even Miss Merton, if she met her accidentally, would make that change in herself which meant a smile. On one occasion, when Ellie rose from her music lesson, receiving, as she closed her book, her master's commendation for the pains she had taken, Miss Janet said,—

"Miss Woodford takes pains in everything now, and gives us all satisfaction. You know, Elspeth, I always told you that whenever you would *really try*, with music or with anything else, you would succeed."

As lengthening days gave token of the approach of summer, joyful tidings came from Wilton.

Mrs. Woodford felt anxious to see her mother; and had determined on so timing her visit that she would be at Cowley during Ellie's summer holiday there.

Ellie now redoubled her efforts for improvement. So earnest was she in her duties that some even spoke of her being likely to obtain the second prize.

"And I'm sure I hope she may," said Lina Willett, on one occasion, when the holidays were drawing near, and party feeling ran high; "and we shall see what that spiteful Miss Jarvis will say then!"

The eventful day for the distribution of prizes and cards once more drew near.

Ellie had not thought of obtaining a prize. All her hopes had been centered on the card. To be able to take one away of a different kind from that which had accompanied her at Christmas, had been her aim; and she knew that, according to her promise, she had done her best. It was, therefore, with a light step that she obeyed her summons, when the day arrived; and she tripped downstairs to the pink parlour.

"Well, Elspeth!" said Miss Janet, as Ellie entered, "I shall not see the mournful expression on your face to-day which followed my giving you your card at Christmas.—Read this," she continued, holding out the Report.

Ellie read, with a blush and a smile.

"Oh, thank you, Miss Janet! I am very glad!"

"You have nothing to thank me for, Elspeth, but a neatly-written card. The character is your own work. I think you know that I am particular to give a strictly correct statement. But *I* am 'very glad,' too, that you have such a report to take as a welcome to your Mama!"

Packing was over. Miss Janet stood at the top of the long table, ready to give her usual parting address, and to distribute the prizes. The elder girls formed a row to her right; the juniors stood on her left.

The distribution of prizes was looked upon as an important event at the Rectory. It occurred but once in the year, and always in the summer. Ellie,

therefore, had never witnessed the ceremony ; and she now watched with curiosity and interest the countenances of those who had been fixed on amongst her companions as the probable victors.

Miss Janet's address contained nothing of particular interest, till she came near its close, and alluded to the prizes.

"And now, young ladies," she said, "I approach a subject which is, doubtless, uppermost in the minds of all. I wish there had been a more general prospective interest in it during the half-year. I should not then have been compelled to distribute such cards as some of you received yesterday. Amongst you, my dears" (turning to her right), "I have not much to say, beyond the expression of a hope that I shall see more industry on the part of all in the coming half-year. I shall surprise you, I daresay, by not following my usual plan, and awarding the prizes to right and left equally. But I feel that the real merit all lies on *this* side" (turning to the juniors). "I am not now speaking of who is the most advanced among you, but of those who have really worked hardest, and improved the most ; and I have no hesitation in naming Phœbe Willett and Elspeth Woodford."

There was a loud murmur of joy and surprise on the left, and a dead silence on her right, as Miss Janet pronounced these names. Phœbe and Ellie looked bewildered. Ellie had long felt sure that the second prize must be Phœbe's ; and Phœbe, on her part, had rather dreaded than otherwise its being awarded to her, lest Ellie (of whom she was growing fonder every week) should be disappointed.



Such an event as both prizes being allotted to the juniors had never before been known.

"Come forward, my dears," said Miss Janet, after a short pause, designed to give effect to her announcement. And the two girls, with burning cheeks and sparkling eyes, walked to her side.

"I do not call them first and second prizes this time," the lady continued. "I think you have both worked equally well, and deserve an equal reward." She then laid in the hands of each a copy of "Hamilton's Letters," handsomely bound, the two being exactly alike, saying, as she did so, "The inside is more to be admired than the binding. I hope that will please you best."

It was a joyous meeting at Cowley that summer holiday. Mrs. Woodford, almost as blooming as Rose herself, stood with her, waiting to receive the young schoolgirl, who was so grown, she said, as quite to have outstripped her expectation. And then, when Ellie gave the card and the prize, and throwing herself, in the old accustomed way, about her mother's neck, whispered, "That is better than it was at Christmas, Mama!" and heard, in reply, her mother's expressions of joy and pride, Ellie's heart bounded, and she felt that it would have been worth tenfold the exertion she had made, to hear her mother speak like that. Sweet, too, were the words of commendation from her mother's mother's lips.

The mornings were usually spent in Grandmama's quiet shady room, which looked into the garden. Here Ellie and her mother brought their work, and joined by Aunt Jessie and Rose in turn, or by a

guest instead, the conversation and the book were chosen to accord with Mrs. Lister's taste ; and to some of her visitors these gatherings proved sources of pure refreshment.

But Ellie's happiest hour was in the twilight, when she would coax her mother to a secluded walk in the garden, and pacing up and down there at her side, as in old times beneath the yew trees or in the grove at Wilton, they talked of home, of precious days gone by, and of happy ones yet to come, if God so willed. There Ellie opened her whole heart, and told into her mother's ear the story of the winter conflict and its close ; how all her folly and her sin seemed to rise up at once in terrible array before her, and drove her to seek peace and pardon at her Saviour's feet. How she hoped now, that although so weak and sinful still, she had a Friend above who was leading her in that right path to which her mother and Sarah had been pointing her so long.

And the mother listened, and gave thanks ; encouraged, and took sweet counsel with her sometime wayward and impetuous child.

Quiet, treasured days were these, in which Ellie learned lessons of wisdom from the lips of age, and received renewed assurance that her daily warfare was ever prayerfully remembered in her distant home by those she loved so dearly.

One joyful hope her mother whispered in her ear at parting. "I have reserved it, darling," she said, as Ellie clung round her to give and receive the last embrace, "because I knew you would want something pleasant to think of in this journey back to Milford. Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose Forrester have

pressed me to let you join Harry for your next summer holidays at Ferndale; and I have agreed that, if all is well, it shall be so. There! Is not *that* enough to stay the tears?"

Ellie recommenced her duties at the Rectory with as much earnestness as she had closed them with credit in her previous half-year. But trouble was not wanting to her even now. For a long while after her return to school, the elder girls, who considered that she had been the means of depriving them of an established right, looked coldly upon her. Many a time the taunting word had to be borne from those who took this method of revenge for her unsought triumph. Often the bitter retort was on Ellie's lip, and the fire of anger lighting in her eye, when the remembrance of some word of promised strength for such a moment would come over her, and stay the wrathful word, and calm the flashing eye to gentleness again, giving her power to bear such words as were sure to follow a victory thus gained.

Christmas was coming round again, and Ellie was daily expecting a letter from her sister, which would inform her of the arrangements for the holidays. Aunt Jessie, however, was the writer of the letter when it did arrive, and the news she communicated were as unexpected as that she should be the scribe. She had been anxious, she said, not to send Ellie painful tidings till the worst was past. Rose, after having been severely ill from rheumatic fever, was at last slowly recovering, but likely, she feared, to be an invalid for many weeks to come. Her doctors said she must exercise much prudence during the

winter, only leaving the house on mild days, and never being out in the evening.

"So here, Ellie," Miss Lister continued, "is an end to all the London plans for the holidays. Grand-mama Woodford was with us here for several weeks, helping me to nurse Rose, and is bitterly disappointed by this illness, having, she says, expected that we should all be together again this Christmas ; and now she will have to go to all the parties alone."

When Ellie found that there was nothing in Rose's present state of health to create alarm, she rejoiced that she would not at present be exposed again to the temptations of gay society. She was sorry for Rose's disappointment, but genuinely glad of her own escape. It would be a quiet, happy visit to Cowley—almost as happy as that in summer.

"I will devote myself to Rose ; and Aunt Jessie and I will make her forget the parties," she determined. But a more arduous task awaited Ellie than she suspected. Rose had had a severe attack, and had been more ill than Miss Lister's letter led Ellie to suppose. When, therefore, instead of finding her sister at least in the parlour to welcome her arrival, she was led up into Aunt Jessie's bedroom, and saw the lately blooming young face, now pale and sharpened, and encircled in a close cap ; the little form that used to be so vigorous, reclining in an easy-chair, enveloped in flannels and shawls—she was so taken by surprise that she had difficulty in preventing herself from making an imprudent manifestation of her feelings.

Ellie soon found also that the severe pain Rose had suffered, and the many unaccustomed restric-



tions of sickness, had wrought a change in her happy young sister in other ways. She was now often the irritable and fretful invalid, the task of ministering to whose pleasure or comfort, instead of being the pleasant one Ellie had pictured to herself, called for as much self-restraint as contact with the tempers of her schoolfellows.

Ellie often left her sister heavy and dispirited, and sought the refreshment of an hour's chat with Mrs. Lister. This little change, with a daily walk, was the only relaxation she permitted herself.

One afternoon, as daylight declined, she stole to Mrs. Lister's side, and sat down on a low stool in silence, her eyes fixed on the overcharged clouds, from which snow was falling.

"How is Rose now, dear?" inquired the old lady, glancing at Ellie's sad face.

"In pain, Grandmama. This north-easterly wind tries her very much."

"And the mind sympathizes with the body, eh, Ellie?"

"Yes, Grandmama. I can think of nothing that seems to please or amuse her. She cannot help dwelling on the gay London doings, which are, as she says, going on just the same as last year, while she is confined to her bedroom with rheumatism."

"Poor dear child! It is a trying complaint for one of her lively and active temperament. Her sufferings were acute during the first few weeks of her illness. I do not wonder that even her sweet temper should fail a little after all she has gone through. But it is dull for you here, my little Ellie?"

"Oh, Grandmama! I don't mind its being dull. You must not think that; but——"

"But you came to Cowley fancying that it would be a pleasant easy task to nurse Rose? You find now that your heavenly Father considers a little discipline—a little trial in temper and patience—a new lesson in self-restraint is needed for His child; that this will be better for her than the serene five weeks at Cowley she pictured to herself when she longed to stay here rather than be exposed again to the temptations of London parties?"

"Grandmama, I had not thought of it in that way. Not, I mean, that poor Rose's fretfulness might be discipline for me."

"Perhaps you have thought often of Christmas during the last six months. And not *thought* only. Your distrust of yourself, and dread of the temptations you found before in gay company, have been told to the Friend above?"

"Oh yes, Grandmama. I did often pray that I might not go to London this Christmas."

"And now the prayer is answered, you find a trial still?"

"I am disappointed, Grandmama. I thought I should be of some use in amusing Rose."

"Well, darling, I can understand that. And what is far better, your heavenly Father understands it too, and knows that *no* trial at the time seems other than grievous and hard to bear. Nevertheless, He has said that it shall work the peaceable fruits of righteousness in them so exercised. You must go on, my little one, doing your very best in the sick-room; striving to glorify God by your

patient gentleness. And if you still find that the reward you looked for is withheld, you must repose in childlike trust on the assurance that *all* the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies."

Ellie listened gratefully to the little homily; looked henceforth upon her light cross from a new and better point of view, and went in the strength of that meat many days.

CHAPTER XXX.

ELLIE was seated at Miss Clara's side one afternoon, after her return to the Rectory, taking her turn as sub-president over the needlework, when one of the elder girls came into the room, and, addressing Miss Clara, asked if she would spare Ellie, as Miss Janet wanted her in the pink parlour.

"Go, Elspeth," said Miss Clara. "I will find some one to take your place till you come back."

Ellie quickly ran down to the pink parlour where Miss Janet sat. Several letters lay before her, and she held an open one in her hand. Ellie smiled, and stepped forward, waiting for Miss Janet to speak.

"I am sorry to say I have bad news for you, my dear," said the lady, slightly raising the letter she held in her hand, and glancing towards it.

The blood left Ellie's cheek; for in Miss Janet's movement she saw that the letter bore a black seal.

"Miss Janet," she said, in a voice scarcely audible. "Oh! *who* is it?"

"Your Grandmama Woodford, Elspeth, I am sorry to say is dead."

Miss Janet was startled by the look of horror which came over Ellie's face.



"Oh, no, no! You must *not* say that!" she exclaimed; and sinking into a chair, was on the point of fainting.

Miss Janet promptly produced her smelling-bottle, and rang the bell for a glass of water.

"Elsbeth, my dear child! I had no idea you were so fond of Mrs. Woodford."

"I wasn't!" gasped Ellie, putting aside the remedies. "I did not love her. Oh! how very, very dreadful!"

"It is often painful, my dear, when our friends are taken from us, to remember that we have failed in respect or affection towards them," said Miss Janet, now feeling sure of her ground.

"Oh! it's not that. Are you *sure*, Miss Janet, that she is really *dead*?"

"Indeed, Elsbeth, the letter says she died on Tuesday. It is from Miss Lister that I have this sad intelligence. She thought it would be better for you to hear it from me."

Ellie clasped her hands, and paced the room muttering to herself, wholly forgetful of Miss Janet's presence.

Puzzled by conduct so extraordinary, and not liking to press her inquiries further, Miss Janet appeared to be engaged with the other letters. While keeping a close observation on Ellie, she remained silent, hoping that her young pupil's sorrow would soon take a more natural course, and that she herself might better understand how to deal with it.

At length she left the room, and soon after Phoebe Willett entered it, bringing a cup of tea.

"Ellie, Miss Janet is anxious you should take this. Do, dear. I am so sorry to hear of your trouble."

"Oh, Phœbe!" said Ellie, raising her tearless eyes to Phœbe's face in a long, abstracted gaze.

"You loved your Grandmama very much, dear, didn't you?"

"Oh, no, it's not *that*. But——Phœbe——I'm afraid——she was not prepared to die."

Phœbe looked greatly shocked.

"Why do you think so, Ellie?"

"Because God says His children must not love this world, which is so full of sin. And I'm afraid that poor Grandmama *did* love the world. Isn't it *dreadful*," she continued, starting up again from the seat she had suddenly resumed, "dreadful to think that we cannot change after death has come, just when we begin to understand all that we have lost by neglecting God, to know that our time for seeking Him is gone—gone for ever!"

"Was she ill long, Ellie?"

Ellie shook her head. "I'm afraid to ask Miss Janet about it. I can't bear to hear it. You know, Phœbe, if she *had* been very ill, even for a few days, some one would have been sure to write to me. No doubt it was a sudden death—and poor-Grandmama has been so gay this Christmas!"

The next day Ellie appeared so unfit for her duties, that she was established in the pink parlour, where Phœbe was allowed to be her companion as often as her own occupations would permit. She was sitting there alone in the afternoon, trying to prepare an exercise at Miss Janet's suggestion. She

strove to fix her thoughts on the duty, but they wandered away.

A knock at the front door startled her. But she remembered that she was safe from intrusion, having heard Miss Janet direct that all visitors should be shown into the drawing-room.

A few moments afterwards she received a summons there. She had scarcely entered the room, when the words :—

“Papa! oh, my poor Papa!” burst from her lips.

Throwing her arms round her father’s neck, she poured on his cheek the first tears she had shed since the news of their loss reached her.

Mr. Woodford was little prepared for such a reception. He was wholly unaccustomed to any show of affection from Ellie. Touched now by the pale and sorrowful face which met his eye as the door unclosed, and more by the tenderness of Ellie’s manner, the long-sealed fountain of love was opened. The bitter waters of grief were surging in his heart. They met, and mingled with the new emotion ; and the proud man was utterly subdued.

“Oh, Papa, think,” said Ellie, struggling to speak, and supposing her father wanted the kind of comfort she herself had so much needed. “*Think* what mighty power Jesus has. Power over all hearts, Papa, to turn them in one moment when He pleases. Dear Papa, *do* take comfort. Don’t sorrow as one without hope. Think of all the glorious, blessed things which may have happened in that sick-room ! Even I know how *soon* the mind may be turned from vanity to real, true desires for God’s grace. Papa! Jesus gives us *everything*, even

faith to be saved by Himself. It is not in *us*. He does it all."

Carried beyond herself in her sorrow and deep sympathy, Ellie's lips poured forth the best consolation her agitated thoughts could frame. Her words went straight home to the secret of the heaviest part of her father's grief. They combated a fear which he would not, in his reverence for his mother, have whispered even to his wife. Ellie forgot to ask herself whether her father would think all this presumption on her part. One terrible thought for the dead filled her own mind, and she felt a conviction that it must be uppermost in his heart too. To soothe this fear, to bring forth all she knew and dared to offer from the Word of God, tending to encourage hope, she felt now to be her allotted part. Mingling with such consolation words of sympathy with him in his sorrow, she spoke on thus till a beam of light entered his heavy heart. Who would have thought that such a beam would enter there by words from Ellie's lips?

There was little to tell of the scene just closed. A cold taken in returning from an evening visit. Inflammation so sudden and violent, that death was there almost before remedy could be sought. A few brief hours of suffering. And that was all.

Ellie dared not ask about those hours, or who had ministered to their deep necessity. Thoughts of Miss Cresswell rose to her mind, and in horror she turned from a suggestion so hopeless, nor ventured one word of inquiry on the subject.

Long in close communion father and child remained. They talked of home and the dear ones

there ; of Rose, and her painful illness ; of the time when, school-days over, Ellie was to be her mother's helper in everything, and "spend her whole life at Wilton."

And then they parted, never to meet or part again in coldness or constraint.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MANY weeks had passed since Ellie's interview with her father. Spring was resigning its place to summer, and the Rectory presented that phase of earnest hard work on all sides, which was its wont to assume, when the last month before the holidays was fairly entered.

Since the sudden calamity in February, all had been mercy and blessing in Ellie's family circle. Rose was restored to health and cheerfulness, and old Mr. Woodford had been settled at Wilton for some time. Ellie had rejoiced at this last arrangement, and the first glad smile which was seen on her face, after that afternoon in February, had accompanied the words:—

"Oh, Miss Janet! Grandpapa is to live with us at Wilton, and is going there directly."

Pleasant accounts of Harry's advancement were not wanting from many sources; and now, Mrs. Woodford, Mrs. Forrester, and even Maud, had written to congratulate both him and Ellie on the expected meeting at Ferndale.

"I wonder whether you will feel *shy* with Harry when you see him," said Lina Willett, one evening,

near the holidays, when "the friends" were gathered in their accustomed corner busy with their needles.

"Shy with *Harry!*" said Ellie, a smile on her lips, and her thoughts glancing back to the grotto, the kitchen at Smith's Farm, and the seat under the mulberry tree.

"Well, Ellie, you know you are not little children now," said Annie Arnold.

"No," said Esther. "You can't think, Ellie, how you've grown since you came to the Rectory."

"Nor how you have altered in everything," said Phœbe.

"*Hasn't* she!" said Lina. "Ellie, we all but you and Phœbe seem much what we were two years ago, only that we want larger frocks, and more to eat, I suppose. But we quarrel just the same, and get into trouble just as we used. And you, who were as bad as any of us the first half, have gone off into a real good girl."

"Well, Lina, if that is true, if I *am* different, it's not I who deserve the praise. You must not give it to me."

"Oh, but I *do*, though. And I heard Miss Clara, the other day, when she was scolding that odious Miss Jarvis, recommending you and Phœbe to her as examples."

"Ellie, I wonder how it *is*," said Esther. "I'm not so much surprised at Phœbe, because she always was the best girl in the school; but you wern't, you know. You got into as many scrapes, and were as disagreeable sometimes as any of the others, at first."

"I have a prescription," said Ellie ; "and I will give it to you, if you like."

"A prescription ! Miss Clara had better have that, and she can give us a dose all round. What a paradise the Rectory will become, if it is effectual !" said Annie Arnold. "Just fancy ! Miss Jarvis, for instance, thoroughly cured !"

"Its power is equal to that or anything a hundred times worse, Annie," and Ellie ran to get a slip of paper, and was writing her "prescription," when she was summoned away. She slid the paper into Esther's hand, and whispering, "Try it, dear. Ask for it. It will make you happier than anything else," she hastened away, leaving Esther clamorously assailed by Annie and Lina, each demanding that it should be read aloud for the benefit of all. Esther looked at the paper, frowned inquiringly, and then said :—

"I'm sure I don't know what it means."

"Read it, at all events," said Lina. "Perhaps *we* shall be able to penetrate the meaning."

"Suppose I read it ?" said Phœbe. "Will you let me, Esther ?"

"Oh, yes, do, Phœbe. You will understand it better than I do, I dare say."

Phœbe read :—

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

"Well, what has that to do with us, I should like to know ?"

"It means that no efforts of our own can change us. It must be God's Spirit working in our hearts, which will make old things pass away, and all become new."

"But do you really mean, Phœbe, to say that you believe *religion* has had anything to do with the change in Ellie?"

"All, everything," replied Phœbe, fervently. "Ellie has no more power in herself than you or Miss Jarvis to ——"

"I beg you will not class me with Miss Jarvis. I hope I am not like her."

"To *us* you are not at all like her, Annie. But ——"

"But what? Take care what you say, Miss Willett!"

"But in God's sight there are only two sets of people in the world."

"Well, I don't belong to Miss Jarvis's set, at any rate."

Phœbe was silent, and looked grave.

"I shall keep Ellie's prescription," said Esther, "though it isn't of much use to me now. There, I'll put it into my Russia-leather needle-case, and let it stay there till I get back to Jamaica. It will be a remembrance of her and our little corner at the Rectory, at least."

"She's *worth* remembering now, whatever may have made her so," said Annie; "and the sooner she comes back from her music the better I shall be pleased. We never seem quite right without her."

Ellie's battles with herself, however ridiculed or disregarded by most of her companions, had been closely watched by Phœbe. She had seen the results of these battles when the gentle reply, the kind action, and zeal in duty, took gradually the place of their marked opposites. With earnest care

she had traced out the *source* from which the power to overcome was gained. Following Ellie's footsteps to that source, she had waited there, telling that *she* too was sinful and weak, and that *she* wanted help to walk aright in the happy path. At last, welcomed and clothed by the same hand in spiritual armour, she too went forth to fight and conquer her own peculiar foes, secretly blessing the dear companion by whose means she had first learned her own deep need, and from whom sure aid would come.

Time hurried on. The school term closed in the usual way, and the day following the departure of her companions from the Rectory, Ellie was borne London-wards in the Milford coach, under Miss Clara's care. The next morning she proceeded on her journey alone to Cranford, a city some twelve miles from Ferndale.

On arriving at Cranford, Ellie looked eagerly around as the horses stopped before the door of an inn ; and in a moment she caught sight of a familiar face. The person to whom this face belonged seemed rather bewildered—much as if she did not know what to do next, or where was the most likely place to find what she sought.

"*Here's* the young lady," said a man with a gold band round his hat, taking hold of the handle of the coach-door as he spoke.

"Let me out, please," intreated Ellie. And, springing to the pavement, she threw her arms round the bewildered female, giving her a hearty kiss.

"Ruth ! dear Ruth ! Only to think of its being

you! I had not the least thought of seeing you at Ferndale; but you are there, I suppose, because your old charge is there—to watch over him, once more?"

"Well, dear me, Miss Ellie!" said Ruth, surprised and much gratified at her reception—for she and Ellie had not been strong allies in former times—"who'd ever have thought of this being *you!* Why, you've grown out of all knowledge. I thought Master Harry would be the biggest; for he's sprung up wonderful. But you've out-topped him."

"How is my Harry? How long will it take us to get to Ferndale? Shall we be there before dark?"

"Ah, that's Miss Ellie now!" said Ruth, laughing, "asking three or four questions without ever waiting for an answer."

"About an hour and a-half to get to Ferndale, Miss," said the man with the gold band, touching his hat, as he handed Ellie into Mr. Forrester's carriage.

The summer evening was closing in, and Ellie began to fear, as the journey proceeded, that she should not see Harry by daylight.

But soon after, the carriage turned out of the high-road, and wound amongst lanes for a mile or more. It then descended a steep hill, made a sharp angle at its base, and, entering there a green gateway, traversed a short drive, and stopped before a house, on the steps of which stood a lady and gentleman, and—Harry.

"Harry! *darling,*" was all Ellie said, as she sprang from the carriage, and clasped him fast,

while he seemed quite unable to speak at all for joy.

"Well, my dear child, you meet him again *at last*," said the gentleman, taking Ellie's hand. "Welcome to Ferndale, where I hope you will both be as happy together as in former times at Wilton!"

A sweet-looking old lady then embraced her and Ellie, suddenly remembering good manner, thanked Mr. and Mrs. Forrester for their welcome, and for sending for her to Cranford, adding a few half-bashful words also, expressive of the pleasure it was to her to come to Ferndale.

Mrs. Forrester, guiding her young nephew, *was* about to lead the way to the sitting-room, when Ellie sprang forward:—

"Oh, may I?" she said, seizing Harry's hand. "I always *used* to lead him."

"Yes," said the lady, smiling; "just as it used to be at Wilton! I give up my charge into your hands for the next five weeks."

"Thank you, Ma'am!" was gratefully pronounced.

"Not, 'Ma'am';—that will never do! We must be 'Uncle' and 'Aunt,' as with Harry, if you please."

Ellie was at her ease in a moment. Throwing aside her bonnet, as soon as they entered the drawing-room, she placed Harry before her, and, telling him to stand still while she looked him well over, she eyed the boy from head to foot.

"You've grown, Harry! and you are thinner. But you've not altered one bit beside. Your hair

curls just as it used. I have that curl I cut off under the mulberry-tree, and I shall compare it with this"—(passing her finger through a lock on Harry's brow). "This is where it came from!"

Harry laughed, and said,—

"And now it is my turn to see if I can find out how much *you* have altered, Ellie. Your voice is not quite the same. It is lower and gentler than it was. You are taller. Here are the ringlets! They have not changed, I am sure. And your face is just the same" (passing his fingers lightly over her features). "I can see it, Ellie, just as it was that chairing-day, and——"

"And we will not allude to old troubles," said Mr. Forrester. "Ellie shall go upstairs now with Ruth, and shake off the dust she has acquired in her long day's travel, while Aunt Gertrude makes the tea."

Ellie went away with Ruth, who was summoned to attend her, and, as soon as the door closed behind her, Mr. Forrester said,—

"Well, Harry, if I like Ellie at the end of her visit as well as at the beginning, I shall say your descriptions of her have not been exaggerated."

"I knew you would love her, as she was; and I am sure by her voice she has improved!" said Harry, with a bright smile.

"It is the expression in her eyes which pleases me," said Mrs. Forrester. "They seem to tell that all is taking a right direction in the mind. And she certainly is very sweet-looking altogether, with

those delicate features, and that beautiful hair. I hope we shall be able to make her holiday pleasant after her long half-year at school."

"Oh, Aunt Gertrude! The five weeks won't be long enough to talk of all we have to say about Wilton and those dear old times. Besides, Percy is coming, isn't he? That will be delightful. Ellie is sure to like him. Wasn't it curious, Uncle, that they should have met like that at Smith's Farm, when neither of them knew who the other was?"

"Ah! That was before your father went to live at Stockington. Percy was on a visit to poor Mary, when the Wellsteads lived at Murfield, wasn't he? You had better tell Ellie that, that she may not make any painful inquiries of your brother."

"Oh, she knows all about that, Uncle! I hope Percy will soon be able to get over his dislike to coming to Stockington. It seems so strange that we should have lived there so long, and he never have been to see us."

"Well, poor fellow, he has had a dreadful blow at his starting in life, and I don't wonder he is long in getting over it."

Ellie reappeared; her black travelling-dress exchanged for a white frock and broad black sash; her long ringlets, newly arranged, falling about her shoulders, and her face lighted up with happiness. Mr. and Mrs. Forrester smiled, told her she looked refreshed, and wisely kept any other feelings her appearance may have inspired, to themselves.

Ferndale Grange was an unpretending semi-modern house, badly situated in a pretty village. It stood so immediately at the bottom of a hill, that the garden which stretched behind it was on a steep slope. The house commanded no other view than that which a beautifully-kept lawn and flower-gardens could supply. Mrs. Forrester was a zealous florist; and the glowing *parterre* which faced the drawing-room windows, crowned by an ample greenhouse, was her own especial recreation, and the admiration of all her friends.

A lingering meal, in which the business of eating was often forgotten in eager questionings and detailed replies, was followed by the Evening Hymn, played by Harry on the organ which stood in the hall; his clear boy's voice calling back old scenes to Ellie's mind, till the remembrance caused her eyes to fill, and her own rich tones to be awhile suspended.

Prayer, earnest, solemn, appropriate, closed the evening; and before long the summer moon was shining on Ellie's sleeping form in an upper room of that abode so often the object of her wistful speculations.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MR. and MRS. AMBROSE FORRESTER were both considerably more advanced in life than Harry's parents. Mr. Forrester was a hale old gentleman, who had passed his threescore years several summers before Ellie's visit to Ferndale; and his lady was but a step or two behind him in the journey of life. Having no children of their own, they had taken an almost parental interest in those of their brother. Percy had found a happy home under their roof when sent to England for education while Dr. Forrester was abroad. Harry was now the object of their especial care, and his holidays had hitherto been spent at Ferndale.

When Mrs. Forrester came from her bedroom on the morning after Ellie's arrival, she found her and Harry hand in hand amongst her flower-beds, the former describing all that was to be seen.

"Why, Ellie," she said, "Harry has never heard so much about my garden before, I expect."

"No, Aunt. Didn't I tell you she knows how to show me everything? I can see it all quite clearly now."

“ Well, I must take a lesson and see if the old Aunt can acquire a more graphic style.”

“ Oh, Aunt Gertrude, it’s only because I’m used to it, and he’s used to my way too. You know that was my part from the first.”

At breakfast the plans for the day were discussed ; and it was agreed that Ellie was to make acquaintance only with Ferndale, and with walks in its immediate neighbourhood, till Percy should arrive ; and then the long drives and picnics were to come.

“ Now, my dears,” said Mrs. Forrester when breakfast was over, “ we are going to our duties. You can do as you please. Either come with me, and see what goes on in my ‘parish-room’ as I call it, or you can sit together in the morning-room, which you will find cooler than any other, and enjoy a chat about old times. Uncle Ambrose has justice business this morning at a distance. So you will not have his company. How do you decide ?”

“ I should like to go with you, Aunt Gertrude,” said Ellie. “ I want to see what goes on in the parish-room, because I have heard so much of it. Harry will come with us I know.”

Ellie’s almost maternal manner towards her young companion soon drew the attention of both uncle and aunt. Loving and gentle always, she still exercised over him a certain authority, to which he appeared unconsciously to yield submission. Any stranger who had heard the two together might have supposed that ten instead of but two years of life lay between them.

“ Aunt Gertrude,” said Ellie, after spending two hours in the parish-room (a room in which comforts

for the poor were stored and dispensed at need),
“when I grow up I should like to have all your plans for my own. I never saw anything so nice before. How happy the poor people here must be!”

“Neatness and order do something for comfort in this world, Ellie. For me they do much. But there would be a poor dependence for *happiness*, would they not?” said the old lady, passing her finger through one of Ellie’s long ringlets.

“Oh, yes, they would. I ought not to have spoken in that way. But Miss Clara has made me think so much of neatness. I didn’t expect, though, to find it in such perfection anywhere but at the Rectory.”

The four were seated in the evening on the lawn just outside the drawing-room window. Mr. and Mrs. Forrester occupied a garden chair, which was placed between the windows. Ellie and Harry sat on the grass near them. Several pretty baskets (all Harry’s work), filled with fruit, stood on the ground, from which Ellie was supplying herself and those around her. From a table just within the drawing-room, Jenkins, Mrs. Forrester’s own maid, handed tea, coffee, and cakes, as they were demanded.

“I see I’ve just come at the right time,” said a voice from the iron fence which separated lawn from carriage-drive.

The tea-drinkers looked round, and Ellie rose from her low seat, supposing, what indeed was the truth, that the new comer was the excellent pastor of the parish, of whom she had heard much.

"Oh, Mr. Chester! The very man I wanted," said Mr. Forrester, hastening to the gate. "We were just talking of you."

"But where's your wife?" said Mrs. Forrester. "I hope you have brought her?"

"Why, no. She could not come to-day. She has an adult class on Thursday evenings, you know, and she never likes leaving it or changing the day. It's a bad plan, we think; if the people find us irregular they will be so too. I came to see this friend of Harry's, of whom he has told me so much," he added, holding out his hand to Ellie. "I hope the meeting has been as happy a one as you expected, Harry, eh?" laying his hand on Harry's shoulder.

"Oh, yes; for she has not altered one bit. She's just my own Ellie as she used to be at Wilton."

"If all was taking a right course, then, *well*. It is a precious thing to find old friends unaltered in their love to us, at all events."

Mr. Chester looked kindly into Ellie's face as he spoke; and she, prepared to reverence him for all that had been told her of his worth, returned the gaze with an expression which evidently impressed him favourably.

"Now you are going to have some tea with us?" said Mr. Forrester.

"Thank you, I won't refuse so good an offer. But there's my pony at the gate. I must see that he is properly secured."

"No such thing! Stay where you are. I'll have him taken to the stable."

As they sat enjoying fruit and tea, Mr. Chester

spoke of a plan he had in his mind for establishing a kind of Missionary Meeting in his parish. He told Mr. Forrester he had thought of proposing to him that it should take place once a month alternately at Linton, his own village, and at Ferndale, beginning with the latter place out of compliment to his friends at the Grange. Mr. Forrester thought the plan excellent, and urged his setting it going at once, while the days continued at the longest.

Mr. Chester talked for some time of different Missions and their progress, and Ellie, who had never heard of a Missionary Meeting, or scarcely thought about the heathen except with a shrinking she hardly recognised as wrong, drew gradually nearer to the speaker. Sitting down on the grass before him, she looked up in his face with an expression of such earnest attention that Mr. Chester paused to inquire—

“Do you feel interested in Missionary Meetings, Ellie?”

“I never heard of them before, nor anything about Missions.”

“I’m not surprised to hear it. But I hope it is what no young girl in England will be able to say five years hence.”

Mr. Chester was rising to leave, when he said to Mr. Forrester—

“By-the-bye, how is Percy? And when do you expect him here? I don’t think I have seen him since Christmas.”

“No. He has been very shabby to us for some time. But he is coming to make up for it now. I am expecting daily to hear when he thinks he sha’

be able to get away from Springfield so as to pay us a reasonable visit."

"Oh, he's coming for some time, then?"

"Well, I hope he will be able to stay a fortnight."

"Good. Then wouldn't it be a famous plan to have the Missionary Meeting while he is here? I would get him to speak, and that would please the people, I know."

"An excellent idea. I'll let you know directly we hear from him."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ELLIE had been a week at Ferndale before anything more was heard about Percy's intended visit. ~~Then~~ there came a letter, and a promise. He would be ~~at~~ the Grange the next day.

On the following afternoon, Ellie and Harry started between one and two to visit an invalid pensioner of Mrs. Forrester's whom they wished to see before Percy's arrival. Mrs. Partridge (the housekeeper) had filled a small basket with her choicest delicacies to tempt the invalid, and Ruth was to take charge of this, and act as attendant on the young people.

"I hope we shall be back in time to meet Percy at the door when he comes," said Ellie, as she and Harry stood on the steps with Mrs. Forrester, waiting for Ruth. "When do you expect him, Aunt?"

"By five o'clock, certainly. He knows our punctual habits too well to keep us waiting for dinner."

"Then we will be sure to be back before that time," said Ellie; and, followed by Ruth with the basket, the two started on their walk.

Their course lay first through the winding lanes which connected Ferndale with the high-road to Cranford. This they would then follow for a short distance, and afterwards, crossing a stile, they would enter the fields which led directly to Compton Farm, whither they were bound.

Ellie and her companions hastened along the more uninteresting part of their walk, and, having arrived at the stile leading to the farm fields, they sat down on it to rest, turning their backs upon the dusty road.

The stile was situated just at the foot of a hill over which the high-road wound; the ascent, though gradual at first, became steep towards the summit; on one side of the road it sloped gently off into level fields towards Compton Farm; on the other it descended abruptly into a beautiful wooded valley, a rough paling alone protecting travellers from the precipitous descent.

"Ellie, you *must* just go and look at Nightingale Valley," said Harry.

"Well, you sit still with Ruth, and I will run and take a peep myself, and I can see it better some other day."

Ellie was soon leaning against the rough paling, enjoying the beauties of the scene beneath; and she turned from it at last reluctantly. Having joined her companions, she was beginning a warm eulogium on the beauty of the valley, when Harry interrupted her—

"Hush! Ellie dear. I think I hear wheels. Perhaps it is Percy."

Ellie listened. "I don't hear anything," she

said. "It's too early for Percy yet. Besides, other carriages come this way as well as Percy's," she added, laughing.

"Yes. But do be quiet, dear, just for a minute."

Again Ellie listened, and now distinctly heard the sound of wheels.

"How the horse is galloping!" said Harry, in a half whisper.

Nearer and nearer the sounds came, the wind which brought them causing them to appear closer at hand than they really were.

"There must be something the matter," said Harry, "whoever it is."

"Law, Master Harry! it's all your fancy. Your hearing is so very quick."

This was more than could be said of Ruth's own auricular sensibilities. But it seemed that Harry was not the only person who had heard boding sounds, for several labourers in an adjoining field ran to the hedge, and looked up the hill.

"There's summat agwine wrong there, or I'm much mistaken," said one.

At this moment a gig appeared in sight, the horse rushing down the hill at a fearful pace, while the driver was evidently straining every nerve to hold him in. In an instant it dashed past the stile, and Ellie exclaimed, in tones of terror:—

"It's Percy! What can we do?"

Before these exclamations had passed the lips of the utterer, the horse, startled afresh apparently by something in the hedge on the opposite side of the road, shied violently. The gig was brought in con-

tact with a dry mud heap, overturned in a moment, and Percy thrown out.

With a cry of distress, the three ran together to the spot, Ellie grasping Harry's hand. The horse was on the ground, struggling desperately to rise. The labourers hurried to the spot, and directed their attention to the animal, while Ruth, Ellie, and Harry gathered round Percy.

"Oh, Percy, are you much hurt?" said Ellie and Harry in one voice.

Percy smiled, and made an attempt to rise. But he fell back, and fainted with the effort.

"Oh, dear heart! He must be badly hurt!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Hush, Ruth!" said Ellie's white lips, imperatively.

"What is the matter? Do tell me all the truth," entreated Harry.

"Yes, dear, you shall know everything. Ruth is frightened because Percy has fainted, but we don't know what is the matter yet. Harry, we must not behave like children. Perhaps Percy's life depends on what we do now. Sit down here for a moment, just to recover yourself, and then you will be able to help us."

This was said in hurried, trembling tones, which plainly told Harry how frightened Ellie herself was.

"Ruth, have you a smelling-bottle?" she inquired, fanning Percy with her hat as she spoke.

"No, Miss, I haven't."

"Can any one get us some water?"

"Aw, eese. There's plenty handy here. But I arn't got nothin' to fetch'n in," said one of the labourers.

At this moment Ellie remembered the basket which was filled for Martha Webb.

"Perhaps there might be something in the basket which would help to restore him," she said, looking with increased alarm on the face before her. "Where is it, Ruth?"

Ruth had wholly forgotten the basket, but now thought she must have left it at the stile.

"Run for it, Ruth! Make haste! Is there any one who knows where a doctor lives?" she inquired of the labourers.

"I do, Miss," said one. "Mr. Clarke lives at the village, yonder."

"That's uncle's doctor, Ellie," said Harry. "Oh, do send for him this minute!"

"That will do. Go as fast as you can. I dare say you know Mr. Forrester at Ferndale? This is his nephew."

The man hurried off, and Ruth now appeared with the basket. Ellie searched among its contents to see if anything in it gave promise to her small experience of being suited to the pressing necessity of the moment. There was a bottle of moderate dimensions at the bottom, but neither smell nor appearance could decide her whether it contained medicine or cordial. Ruth's senses were too scattered by her fright to enable her to tell anything about it. She only knew that Mrs. Partridge put up "all kinds of things" for Martha.

Ellie unloosed the handkerchief about Percy's neck, chafed his hands, and did all she could call to remembrance to restore consciousness. But he remained still in a death-like faint. Ruth

fanned him and wrung her hands by turns, and added to Ellie's distress by her uncontrolled demonstrations of fear.

"What *can* we do?" cried Ellie. "He must not remain like this till the doctor comes. Emptying the contents of the bottle into the road, she entreated one of the two remaining labourers to run and get it filled with water.

By this time the horse was extricated, and on his legs again, and was standing quietly enough, held by one of the men.

The moments seemed like hours, and Ellie, unable to endure her increasing anxiety, rose again from Percy's side, where she was kneeling, to look impatiently after the man who had gone for the water. Through clouds of dust she saw, in the opposite direction from that in which Percy had come, a horseman approaching at a walking pace. He was evidently ignorant that anything unusual was going on so near him. Ellie hoped, whoever it might be, he would be helpful in some way, and waved her handkerchief to attract the rider's attention. The action seemed at first unnoticed or mistaken. But now it appeared to strike the horseman that something was wrong, and urging his steed, he was amongst the anxious party in a few moments, and Ellie's relief was great when she saw Mr. Chester at her side.

"Can you help us? We've nothing to give him," she said.

Mr. Chester put his hand in his breast-pocket.

"Fortunately, Mrs. Chester gave me some harts-horn for a poor person before I started. Here,

Ellie, touch his temples and nostrils with it. You will do it more gently than I can."

Ellie knelt, and with a trembling hand applied the hartshorn. The man now appeared with water, and after she had well bathed the forehead and lips of the still fainting patient, a few drops of hartshorn were administered in water, and their beneficial effect was quickly visible.

Percy now opened his eyes. Again he tried to move, but, with an expression of pain, and tightly compressed lips, he relinquished the attempt. Almost with an answering sound, Ellie looked into his face; but remembering that cheer was as much needed as sympathy, she said:—

"We shall soon have a doctor for you, Percy. The man has been gone some time to fetch Mr. Clarke. A little more hartshorn, and you will be quite restored."

Percy obeyed, and casting his eyes around him, he became aware that Mr. Chester held one hand, and Harry the other, while both were endeavouring to encourage him with hopeful assurances of speedy succour.

Ellie, calling Mr. Chester aside, exchanged a few words with him.

"Yes, that will do; you manage it, Ellie," was his last reply.

Percy had now fully recovered consciousness, and was able to tell that the part he thought injured was his shoulder; he was not sensible of severe pain in any other.

"And that will not be dangerous," said Ellie, "only very painful," she added, changing the

cheerful tone she had tried to adopt, to one of sympathy.

"I can bear pain," said Percy, with a faint smile.

"I want you, Ruth, to go home with Harry as quickly as you can," said Ellie, addressing her scared attendant, "and tell Mr. and Mrs. Forrester what has happened. Don't frighten them. Only say that Mr. Percy has been thrown out of his gig, and that Mr. Clarke is sent for. Say that he is quite sensible, and only complaining of pain in one shoulder ; and tell Mr. Forrester that Mr. Chester thinks he had better come with the carriage directly, and bring one of the men-servants with him, in case Mr. Percy should want more help than we have here."

"*Pu* tell them, Ellie, all about it. I won't frighten them," said Harry.

"If Clarke was at home he ought to be here soon," said Mr. Chester, to whom Ellie had recounted the leading circumstances of the accident, and what she had done. A few minutes afterwards they had the satisfaction of seeing the doctor's horse descending the hill at a brisk trot, and soon Mr. Clarke was at his patient's side.

A few questions, and but little examination, were needful.

Percy's right shoulder was dislocated.

"Well, it's bad ; but it might have been worse. Now, the first thing is to get him home," said Mr. Clarke.

Ellie explained that Mr. Forrester's carriage was sent for, and would no doubt be there soon.

"Miss Forrester, I presume?" said the Doctor, bowing, with a look of surprise at Ellie.

"No," said Mr. Chester. "This is Harry Forrester's friend—'sister' he does certainly call her, though. If you have seen much of Harry, you must have heard of her, I think?"

"Oh, ah—indeed—yes—no doubt," was the polite evasion.

Mr. Forrester's carriage, with the owner himself inside it, soon appeared. He looked pale and anxious. But Percy had by this time, with the joint assistance of Mr. Chester and the doctor, been raised to a sitting posture, and his face having assumed a more lifelike colour, the picture presented to the eye of the new comer was by no means as alarming as that on which Mr. Chester's first glance had rested; and Mr. Forrester was evidently relieved.

The patient was at once assisted into the carriage. Ellie placed herself opposite him, hartshorn in hand, and thus, at a funereal pace, and with much suffering on Percy's part, the party proceeded towards the Grange.

Mr.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EVERY preparation for Percy's comfort had been made by the time he reached Ferndale.

The patient was no sooner established in his bedroom there, than the surgical part of Mr. Clarke's duty received his first attention.

This seemed to the young people a terrible affair. The time required for the operation they would have pronounced to be hours. But at length the bedroom door opened, the quick nervous step of Uncle Ambrose was heard on the stairs, and Mrs. Forrester, Ellie, and Harry hurried into the hall to meet him.

"It's over. The dislocation is reduced," he said, "and now we trust nothing is wanted but care and quiet."

"Poor dear fellow, and how did he bear it?" inquired Mrs. Forrester.

"Courageously, you may be sure. But it was a terrible pull. He is very faint just now, and his nerves seem a good deal shaken. Mr. Clarke thinks it will be better for no fresh person to go into the room to-night. Jenkins will attend on him; and Mr. Chester says that he shall stay till the evening.

But he wants you just to write a note to his wife, telling her about the accident, and how he is engaged. Ellie," he continued, going up to her, and laying his hand on her head, "where did you learn to act the woman as you have done to-day?"

"I couldn't do anything at all, Uncle," she replied, looking up in his face. "We had nothing to give Percy, and Ruth '*went on*' so!"

Mr. Forrester smiled, but Ellie's conscience pricked her.

"I ought not to have said that of Ruth," she added penitently, "for she was dreadfully frightened."

"Well, we may say that she lost her self-possession, and that happily Ellie retained hers. Now, wife, write this note, or Mrs. Chester will be getting anxious. And there have been anxious hearts enough amongst us for one day."

By the time the note was written and despatched to Mrs. Chester, the doctor had come from Percy's room. He gave a favourable report of his patient, and said he had fully instructed Jenkins in all that was needful for the night.

At an earlier hour than usual, that Mr. Chester might conduct the service, the whole household assembled in the dining-room for family prayer. There thanksgiving for the preserving mercy of the morning was duly offered.

In all Ellie's waking moments during that night—and they were not few—she listened to hear if any stirring in the adjoining room indicated that the patient was not sleeping. Even her quickened senses, however, could detect no move-

ment. When Ruth came to say it was dressing time, she informed Ellie that she had just that minute come from Mr. Percy, and he had told her to go up to Miss Ellie and say he had slept through the greater part of the night, and felt much better.

"Did he send that message to *me*, Ruth? How very kind of him!"

"Why you see, Miss Ellie, I felt as it was my bounden duty to tell him that it was *you* who did everything, and thought of everything for him yesterday, while I, a poor helpless old creature, could only make a fool of myself."

"Oh, Ruth," replied Ellie, whose heart was touched directly by this confession, "you were so frightened, you know, and you have loved and waited on Mr. Percy so many years."

"That's true, Miss Ellie, so I have. And I didn't use to be always so foolish. But when one gets old, it seems to put one more into a twitter when things goes wrong, than it did when one was a gal, as we may say."

"And how does Mr. Percy *look* this morning, Ruth?"

"Very pale, and his shoulder is swelled up dreadful. But Jenkins says it's cooler than it was last night."

Smiling faces and thankful hearts encircled the breakfast-table at Ferndale Grange that morning. Mr. and Mrs. Forrester had both seen Percy, and were, they said, satisfied that he was going on well. Mrs. Forrester proposed that after breakfast Ellie and Harry should pay him a short visit. The proposal was gladly accepted.

"Are you disposed to receive young visitors this morning, Mr. Percy?" Mrs. Forrester inquired as she stood at his door when breakfast was over.

"If 'young visitors' are disposed to visit me, certainly I am."

"Dear Mr. Percy!" said Ellie, taking the hand he held out to her. "How glad I am to hear you are better! But how *this* hand is swollen! Was this one hurt too?"

"It was strained with the exertion of endeavouring to hold in my rebellious steed. I shall be a helpless person for some days, I expect—quite dependent on all my good friends here."

"Oh, Mr. Percy, we shall be so pleased to nurse you! Only think," she added solemnly, "what a blessing it is that you are not *much* worse."

"You thought it likely things might be worse when you saw me coming down Nightingale-hill at that mad pace, eh Ellie?"

"I never wish to think of that minute any more," said Ellie, "except when I want to raise up grateful thoughts of God's goodness," she added earnestly.

"It was *great*—great in the preservation of my life, and great, too, in providing friends at hand at such a moment. Which earthly one should thank first, Ellie?"

"Mr. Chester," said Ellie in decided tones: "he was the only one who did anything, or knew how to do anything."

"That is not the report he gives himself. He seemed to have a fancy that there was a certain young girl there who acted with remarkable self-possession for her age."

"It was very kind of Mr. Chester to say so. But I can't recollect anything I did except fan you."

"And pour Mrs. Partridge's choice bottle of mead into the road to obtain a vessel for the conveyance of water, I think I heard," said Mrs. Forrester, smiling.

"Oh, Aunt, was that mead? I was afraid it was medicine. I should have been glad enough if I had found some wine there."

"Well, the right thing came at last, and now that terrible scene is amongst the things that are past."

Mr. Forrester now made his appearance, and there was a general discussion of yesterday's catastrophe.

"I am to give up my young assistants to you to-day, Percy, I believe. Your uncle is going out, and I must not have you left alone for two hours," said Mrs. Forrester a few days after the accident, as Percy slowly entered the dining-parlour just as his aunt was preparing to leave it for her morning duties.

"I shall be well pleased if *they* are so," said Percy.

Ellie looked delighted.

Her old admiration for the "stranger" was mingled now with a deep sympathy in Percy Forrester's early grief. His superiority in all that she was learning most to admire and venerate, made him seem almost a sacred person in her eyes. Her manner towards him was a combination of respect and tenderness which had something even filial in it.

"You will like to sit in the morning-room, Mr. Percy, I suppose?" said Ellie.

"Yes, the morning-room always carries the day in the summer. If you were a winter visitor here, you would find it less popular. But why is it *Mr.* Percy, Ellie? If my memory serves me, I did not hear that prefix to my name when I was lying by the roadside in that inglorious state."

"Oh, I was too frightened to remember politeness then," said Ellie, colouring.

"And I suspect it is not often used when you and Harry are talking together, and honour me by making me the subject of your conversation?"

"No, I don't like to say it then. It seems so stiff with Harry," she replied apologetically. "But I could not take the liberty of calling you the same when I speak to you."

"Let it be the same. I shall not consider it a liberty."

"I was thinking myself it did not sound quite as homelike as I wish everything at the Grange to be to my little niece."

"You will not hear it again, Aunt," said Percy. "Ellie, do you like poetry?"

"Oh, we used to be so fond of it, and have such sweet, happy evenings at Wilton, Mama reading to us, and we sitting at work by her side. But there is but little poetry at the Rectory. No girl would dare to take a volume to school with her."

"Well, I suppose I should shock the good ladies at the Rectory, for I was going to propose reading to you from a volume I have here, from which I have been deriving great pleasure of late."

"Mama would not disapprove of it, I am sure, if **you** like it."

"What is it, Percy?" inquired Mr. Forrester, **raising** his eyes from his newspaper.

"Wordsworth's great work, the 'Excursion,' **Uncle**. Have you seen it?"

"Oh, yes; and have been greatly pleased. I **think** Wordsworth has accomplished his end, and **made** his name immortal now."

There was a general move, and the three repaired to the morning-room. Percy's arm was still in a **sling**; and Ellie placed a chair in the window, and a **small** table for his book, asking him to get settled while she went to fetch Harry's plaiting, and her own work.

"How beautifully Harry does that weaving!" said Percy, as he watched Ellie put into his brother's hands a half-finished basket, and arrange the osiers for his use.

"Oh, Percy, I wish you could see the first baskets we ever made, and *where* we made them, too!" said Harry.

Ellie laughed.

"I wonder what we should think of them now? I daresay Mrs. Smith has them still. But, Harry, Percy has seen the place.—You were lying there," she said, turning to him, "the first time I saw you."

"Under the great walnut-trees, at Smith's Farm?"

"Yes, there;—where fairies must live, if they ever do live anywhere."

Then, turning gladly to the past, she and Harry

called up the old days, in descriptions of their life at Mill Cottage, Smith's Farm, and Wilton. The time flew by unheeded, and Percy listened with delight to the young voices, as fresh and innocent as the feelings to which they gave expression.

Mrs. Forrester came into the room, and Ellie looked up, supposing she had come to fetch something.

"Well, how do you like the 'Excursion,' young ones?" she inquired.

"We have not begun yet, Aunt," said Ellie, in a composed voice, resuming her work, which she had dropped in her eager chat.

"Then when *are* you going to begin, my dear! Because I have *done*, and it's close upon luncheon-time."

"Done! Luncheon-time, Aunt! Oh, you *are* joking!"

"I am in sober earnest."

Percy took out his watch, and held it up:—

"Look here, Ellie!"

The hands pointed to a quarter to one.

"I cannot understand it," said Ellie, with a puzzled expression.

"The fact is, Aunt," said Percy, "we have been so long an excursion ourselves this morning, that I believe we had all forgotten Wordsworth had one to describe to us. We have been visiting Wilton and its neighbourhood."

"Then I am not surprised that the young ones should have forgotten how time was flying."

"They made the visit so interesting to their

companion, that his memory was fully as much at fault as theirs, on the subject."

"Well, they seem to have performed their part of entertainers satisfactorily, at all events. Hark! Isn't that Mr. Chester's voice? Now, I want to persuade him to bring his wife, and dine with us to-morrow; and then, perhaps, we can settle about the Missionary Meeting."

"Indeed! Is Mr. Chester thinking of having one?"

"Oh yes, Percy, and you are to speak. It is to be held while you are here, on purpose."

Mr. Chester entered at this moment, and warmly expressed his pleasure at seeing the invalid restored to his ordinary dress, and looking (save the sling) almost himself again. He had been a daily visitor at the Grange since the accident, for between him and Percy there had long existed a bond of deep and holy attachment.

During luncheon Mrs. Forrester made her intended proposal, and gave her invitation. This was so warmly seconded by every one round the table, that Mr. Chester said he could not resist such solicitations, and that he believed he and Mrs. Chester must give themselves a holiday to rejoice with their friends on Percy's recovery.

Mr. and Mrs. Chester's visit was just what that of an English Pastor and his wife should be. Cheerful converse, always tintured with reverence and godly fear; holy truths decking, as bright gems, the friendly intercourse; plans suggested for the wider spreading of Gospel light around, occupied the hours of that pleasant day.

At evening there came united and direct communion with Him, the acknowledged Source of every earthly good, and of enduring blessings yet more to be desired.

Ellie felt, as she undressed that night, more than ever before, how blessed is the lot of the righteous; how high and pure are the enjoyments, even here, of those who are travelling heavenwards. Her own petitions to be led in *their* path, to be kept from ever thinking any other worth pursuing, were longer and more urgent as she thought upon these things.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"PERCY," said Ellie, the next morning after the Missionary Meeting—which had proved as complete a success as even its most ardent promoters desired—kneeling down, as she spoke, on a stool before him, and looking straight into his eyes with a grave countenance, "I've been here three weeks to-day, and I've only two more to stay."

"And I shall have been here two weeks to-morrow, and have *no* more to stay!" he replied, returning her grave expression, and then suffering his face to relax into a smile.

"I can't help being sorry that our happiness passes away so quickly. The thought used to make me miserable; and even now, when I know that God has something so much better for those who love Him, after this life is over, I am sad when such happy days as these are gone."

"Yes, Ellie. It needs all our watchfulness and constant prayer to keep our hearts unenthralled by that kind of happiness. It is more dangerous to sensitive minds, than the coarser pleasures are to their votaries. It often steals our heart's best homage from the right Object; and, while we fancy

we are only grateful for God's mercies, we are setting up idols in His place."

"What *can* I do? I can't help loving people like you, and my Harry, and Uncle and Aunt Forrester! And then, the beautiful country—who can help loving that?"

"Well, my child, such love is nowhere condemned. Only, Ellie, we must be on our guard. However pure in itself, it chains us down to earth, unless a higher Power than our own holds it in check."

"Oh, Percy! I wonder if you know how hard it is even to *wish* to have it checked?"

"A little, Ellie!"

The sound of his voice made her start, as he uttered the words. It brought his great sorrow to her mind. Grieved for having said anything calculated to touch the hardly healed wound, she looked down and played with the work she held in her hand, afraid to speak, lest she should only *make* things worse. But Percy saw and understood her embarrassment and distress.

"Perhaps, Ellie," he said, "if one temptation has been greater to me than another through life, it has been that of clinging too closely to the dear ones God has given me. Yes, I know it all. I know what it is to feel how small a thing in my esteem it would be to part with anything, everything else on earth, rather than endure loss or estrangement *there*. I can sympathize in your feelings, and, therefore, can, perhaps, help you a little in your difficulty. It is not by trying rudely to break these strong affections, or by striving to acquire coldness

or indifference, that you will gain command over them; but by taking such feelings, in all their depth and warmth, to Him who first implanted them; asking Him to check the wild luxuriance of their growth, and with His own hand to direct their spreading branches, that they may rise and bear fruit to His glory, rather than, trailing on the earth, weigh down to it the hearts from which they spring. Did you ever think of trying this '*plan*' with these troublesome sensibilities, Ellie?" he said, putting back the long curls which shaded her face.

"No, I've hardly dared even to look at them myself. I have had such strange bad thoughts sometimes about it. I have felt almost afraid even to mention those I love so dearly in my prayers, lest God should see how precious they were, and be obliged to take them from me that I might love Him best."

"Then they were idols indeed, Ellie, and the poor little worshipper was sadly forgetful of the heart-searching character of that God whose place they had taken. But fear not, little one. You and I, too, have done all this, and much worse, if that be possible; but our Saviour has compassion on our weakness still. His ready ear of pity is open ever. Henceforth, Ellie, shall He be told the first when earthly affections grow too fast?"

"I will try to remember what you have said."

"And have no concealments from Him who alone can help you."

"I will, indeed, strive not to have any."

Mr. and Mrs. Forrester insisted that as the first

week of Percy's visit had been given to the doctor, he should bestow another on his Ferndale friends to make up for it. Percy was easy to be persuaded, and, with brightening eyes, Ellie heard the thing settled, and plans for the following week decided on.

Excursions to places of interest in the neighbourhood, visits to friends—including a whole long day at Linton Vicarage, filled up that delightful week. With tearful eyes, Ellie silently took her place at the breakfast-table on the morning of Percy's departure. Harry was silent, too ; and on the part of the two young ones, but little justice was done to Mrs. Partridge's delicacies.

"Harry, I have been making a plan," said Percy, as he handed his cup to Mrs. Forrester for replenishment. "You say Ellie is the best of all plan-makers, so I submit it to her as well."

Harry turned his head, but did not ask to hear the plan. He seemed absorbed in some other thought. Ellie said something in a voice which was not audible.

"Well, you are not encouraging, I must say, young people," said Mr. Forrester. "You receive the first intimation of a plan very coolly."

"I shall proceed, Uncle, in spite of that ; and then, if the idea finds favour in the course of revelation, I suppose I may consider it the greater compliment. Harry, when does my father think of your going back to Stockington ?"

"In two years, Percy, he said I should be ready."

"And Ellie is to bid good-bye to the Rectory at

the same time, is she not ? ” Percy inquired, glancing towards Ellie as he spoke.

“ Yes. I am to go home when Harry does, I hope.”

“ Well, you have both said more than once since we have been here that you would like us to visit Wilton together. Shall we think of taking the journey at the same time, when you return to Stockington ? I daresay it would not be difficult to persuade my uncle and aunt to go with us.”

“ Oh, Percy, that would be delightful ! ” burst, in joyful accents, from the lips of both.

“ Well, if our lives are spared, I think we could not make a better arrangement. Uncle, what do you say ? ”

“ That if Aunt Gertrude approves your plan, and we have not grown too old by that time, I should like it very much.”

“ We will hope,” said Percy, “ that age will not interfere, and that all else being prosperous, our next meeting, Ellie, will be in connexion with a journey to Wilton.”

Percy’s gig was now announced, and he drove away in company with the old coachman of the Grange, who, Mr. Forrester declared, should see him safe under his own roof again.

The same evening Mr. and Mrs. Chester arrived, as if by chance, just in time for tea. Saying little about Percy, they contrived to interest the circle at the Grange on other subjects. They suggested some visits for Ellie and Harry the next day to several persons in the village, giving into their charge tracts and messages to be then delivered.

When Ellie went to her room at night she was surprised to find she had spent a cheerful evening, and was looking forward with pleasure to the execution of the commissions for the next day with which she had been entrusted. The thought, however, uppermost in her mind was Percy's "plan" for going back with her and Harry to Stockington. Ellie paused in her undressing, and presently found herself so busy with her day-dreams, that it was needful to draw in the reins of her imagination, and come back to things present.

A few days more, and loving lips again were speaking farewell words. The parting between Ellie and Harry was not without tears on both sides ; but it was not that hopeless sorrow which had oppressed both when, two years before, they separated for the first time. The hill was climbed now, and from its summit they saw *home* in the valley beneath. They journeyed together to Cranford. The institution where Harry was receiving his education was there, and there Ellie would meet the coach which was to take her on her long solitary journey.

"God bless my dear little niece," said Mr. Forrester, at parting. "She leaves in the hearts of her Ferndale friends as pleasant a memory as she could well desire. If life and health are spared, our next meeting is to be in London, on our way to Wilton."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Two years have fled, and Midsummer-day is just at hand. The great schoolroom at the Rectory, but yesterday so noisy and so busy, is silent now. No sound stirs in the tenantless bedrooms, and the doors of the capacious wardrobe in the dressing-room stand open, showing empty shelves. Corded boxes and packing-cases occupy the middle of this room, and from the care with which they are fastened, there is evidently a long journey for them in prospect. Others, less bulky, are waiting ready in the hall below, and these seem invested with some peculiar interest, for the three ladies of the house are standing together watching the servant as she nails on their directions.

Through the branches of the filbert-trees may be seen the fluttering of light garments, as the wearers pace the terrace-walk. To these we will draw nearer. Can those tall girls, with the soft blue eyes, and the sparkling dark ones, be the Arnolds and Willetts of four years ago? And that other, with the sweet earnest face which is turned so lovingly from time to time upon those of her companions—can that be Ellie, the anxious, querulous

child we see back in the far distance, trembling at her bedside in fear of the watchman ?

Even so. Ellie has left her childhood behind. School-days, too, are over. Her last hour at the Rectory has come, and now in womanhood's bright morning, she waits in her travelling-dress a summons to the coach which is to take her to London—the first stage on her way back to Wilton.

But there is a parting first. As if the answer to that passionate inquiry of Ellie's unbridled childhood : " I wonder whether, as long as I live in this world, there will ever be anything *quite* right ! " were to ring through her whole life, even amidst the sunshine of this day, which turns her long averted face homewards, there hangs a cloud. As those young girls pace the garden-walk, no voice is heard. The eager question, the laughing or grave reply, we listen for in vain. Long they walk in silence, Ellie's hand held fast. A quick step on the gravel rouses them.

" The coach will be at the door in a quarter of an hour, and the ladies wish to see Miss Woodford in the pink parlour."

" Oh, Ellie, dear, dear Ellie ! We shall never meet again."

" Not on earth, Esther ; perhaps never again here. But *there*"—pointing upwards, with a smile and fast-falling tears—" *there*. I will not say *shall* we meet, dear Esther. It *must* be. For nearly four years we five have loved each other and lived in peace ; and almost every day for more than half that time I have prayed that *one* hope might bind us when the parting came. Phœbe has that hope, and

even *I* have it ; and it may be yours if you will only take it. *Do* seek it, my dear companion—my kind little schoolfellow !”

“Ellie,” said a trembling voice, “we shall soon be on the wide Atlantic, bound for another land. But who knows if we shall ever reach it ? Don’t forget us in the joy of going home. Still remember us who yet have not your hope—I mean, still ask that your God may be ours ; and that, whether our bodies lie at the bottom of the sea at last, or sleep quietly in a churchyard grave, we may *all* meet in that world to which you are going. I know whose ‘set’ I belong to now. I once said indignantly that it was not Miss Jarvis’s. But I have been learning since that *it is*. I could not tell you, Ellie, that these things were in my mind ; for I knew that every day you would hear and see that which would make you doubt me. But I have been *trying* to seek what you and Phœbe have made so lovely to us all. I think the precious hope will come—I do not think it is *denied*. We who will never see each other’s faces again need have no concealments now.”

“Annie, is it really so ? Could anything have been so sweet in our sad parting as these words of yours ? Pray for you, dear ? Yes, indeed I will. But to-day it will be all thanksgiving. I am going home with a store of new friendships, and all to last—for ever.”

Another urgent summons closed the scene abruptly.

Clinging in turn about their friend to the last moment, the four girls wept now in almost speechless

sorrow. Ellie, breaking away from them at last, hurried to the pink parlour, where the three ladies were assembled.

As with streaming eyes she entered the room so filled with school-day associations, Miss Merton gave a loud clear-up, clenched her teeth, and straightened her back; Miss Janet went to the window and looked out, endeavouring to conceal the real expression on her face by an inquiring frown; Miss Clara, after giving one glance at Ellie, knitted away with extraordinary zeal.

"Dear Miss Merton," said Ellie, trying to be composed, and taking the lady's stiff hand, "I want to thank you before I go for my happy life at the Rectory, and for all I have learned. I want to ask you, and dear Miss Clara, and Miss Janet, if you will try to forget all the trouble I have ever given you, and to think of me sometimes when I am gone. I shall appreciate your goodness more than I have ever done, in looking back upon it."

A startling sob from Miss Merton followed these words.

"I'm sure you have *not* given us trouble," issued from her lips.

"No, Elspeth," said Miss Janet, no longer attempting to appear unmoved; "you leave behind you a pleasant memory. It is not 'Shall we ever think of you?' but 'When shall we cease to miss you?'"

"Elspeth, my dear," said Miss Clara, "I'm sure I cannot tell how *I* shall bear the next half-year. My empty room—all my good, pleasant children gone!"

"Oh, Miss Clara, it will not be empty," said Ellie, with a returning smile.

"Worse than empty to me, my dear. It is a melancholy thing that there is so much parting in the world."

"And a glorious truth," said Ellie, throwing her arms about Miss Clara's neck, "that there is another where there will be *none*."

"The coach," said a voice which accompanied an abrupt opening of the door.

The ladies rose, sat down, rose again, then embraced Ellie.

"Good-bye, Elspeth. Be in your home what you have been with us, and your parents will have cause to think proudly of you."

These words accompanied Miss Janet's last kiss, and Ellie was hurried away.

Glancing upwards at the house, as the coach was starting, she saw four faces at an upper window. Hands and handkerchiefs were waved, and eyes strained to meet each other from the window and the coach. Then between those girl-friends wide and wider grew the distance.

A few months afterwards their homes lay in different hemispheres.

And on earth they met no more.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ELLIE's face had regained its composure before the coach stopped in the crowded London street. Jenkins made her appearance as the coachman dismounted, and gave brisk directions for the transfer of Ellie's luggage from its present position to a hackney-coach she had in waiting.

"We won't stay about here, Miss Ellie. You look very pale," she said, not allowing Ellie time to make any inquiries till she had her fairly into the new vehicle and they were off.

"When did Mr. and Mrs. Forrester come up?" Ellie asked, as soon as the coachman's whip sounded.

"On Saturday, Miss. They are getting too advanced in life now to travel two days together such long journeys. So they thought it was better to rest in London for a couple of days, as you wouldn't be ready till Tuesday."

"Master Harry is with them, I suppose?" said Ellie.

"Oh! yes, Miss. *Mr.* Harry would have gone clean out of his senses, I expect, if he had been left behind. How you've grown, Miss!"

Ellie noticed the emphasis on the word *Mr.*

Perhaps its utterance caused her fully to realize, for the first time, that childhood was gone. It made her silent, and the vehicle had threaded several streets before she spoke again.

"When does Mr. Percy come?" she inquired, at last.

"I believe the coach gets in between seven and eight, Miss. He's so much better, Miss Ellie; it's quite good to see him."

"I'm glad to hear that. Do Mr. and Mrs. Forrester think so too?"

"Oh! yes, Miss. They can't be off thinking it. Why, sometimes, when he came to the Grange after his trouble, he'd sit the whole afternoon and never speak a word, with the pitifullest face you ever see. Now he's quite cheerful, plays on the piano, and all manner—just as he used. This is the inn, Miss Ellie, and there's Master and Mr. Harry at the door."

Ellie might have failed to recognise Harry in the tall youth who stood beside Mr. Forrester, but for the shade over his eyes, and the arm slid dependently within that of his companion.

Ellie was led through the crowd which obstructed the entrance, and hurried upstairs. Mrs. Forrester was waiting for her there, and embraced her affectionately. She was turning to put her arms about Harry's neck, as of old, when he exclaimed joyfully, "No more school, Ellie. The dreaded four years are over."

That voice! It was not Harry's—not the same which had sounded in her ears through all their happy childhood. With a burst of

tears she could not restrain, Ellie chokingly articulated—

“Oh, Harry! how I wish we could have remained children all our lives!”

“Now, my little niece’s heart has been aching all day with those partings yonder, I can see by her face,” said Mr. Forrester; “and Harry’s cracked voice is enough to frighten anybody.”

Ellie laughed through her tears, and said she was not frightened, but that it had taken her by surprise. She had not thought of there being any change in Harry.

“Because, Uncle, he had altered so little, you know, during the first two years we were separated.”

“Well, he has made up for it now. Such a lamp-post of a fellow as he has become! Why, I’ve been obliged to make all the servants say *Mr. Harry*. It was too ridiculous to call him *Master* when he ran a risk of running his head through the ceiling. But we won’t talk about changes. I want you, Ellie, to be quiet and rest a while before Percy joins us. Gertrude, my dear, just take her to her room, and see what you can do for her. It’s not five o’clock yet, and Percy will not arrive till half-past seven, so there is plenty of time for her to rest. I should like us all to be together and in good spirits to welcome him.”

“I think I know what will do her good,” said Mrs. Forrester, putting a soft, mesmeric arm round Ellie’s waist, and leading her away.

“This has been an April day with you, Ellie, I can see,” she added, when they had reached the bedroom, “and I want you to talk no more at

present, but to lie down and rest till I come to you again."

Thankful for the solitude after her late excitement, Ellie lay down and closed her eyes.

When she opened them again, Mrs. Forrester was smoothing back the curls from her brow, and Jenkins stood beside her, holding a cup of tea.

"Now, you have done just what I wished," said Mrs. Forrester. "Take the tea Jenkins has brought, and then I hope we may all look forward to a happy evening. Percy ought to be here in less than half-an-hour."

Ellie took the tea, and rose much refreshed. When she reappeared in the sitting-room she looked, as Mr. Forrester said, "quite another person."

"Now, what a meeting this is for us all, isn't it, Ellie? Only think of two old folks like us having a niece and three nephews under our care for the journey to-morrow!"

"Three, Uncle?"

"Three, to be sure. Do you forget that I have a nephew named David, as well as one named Harry?"

"I had forgotten David, Uncle, I must confess. He is going with us, then, to-morrow?"

"Yes. He matriculated in April, and begins his College life in October, so he wants to have a good long holiday with his father and mother before that time. Now, Ellie, I want to hear something about your folks at home. Your mother has been ailing, has she not?"

"Mama was poorly in the spring, but I hope she is much better. Papa had to go into Scotland, and

he took her to Scarborough on his way, and left her till he returned. Mrs. Forrester went with her."

"So I heard. And Rose has been to Stockington, hasn't she, or Wilton rather?"

"Yes. That was a disappointment to me, for I wished to have been at home when she was there. She and Aunt Jessie went last summer. I ought not to complain, though, for dear Grandmama was left under my care, and I had a happy five weeks at Cowley alone with her."

At this moment the door was opened by a young man, whom Ellie saw at a glance was David. Hesitatingly he half-retreated; finally he stretched out his hand to Ellie, with a smile of genuine pleasure.

"Why, Ellie!" he said, "I really did not recognise you at the first moment."

"Then mine is the better memory, David, for I recognised you directly."

"But I was not at all prepared for such a—a— young lady."

"Did you expect I should have grown into an *old* lady in five years?"

"I don't know what I expected. Not what I see, certainly."

"I daresay he has not given you a single thought since you parted, my dear," said Mr. Forrester.

"Now, Uncle, that really is too bad. You might as well accuse me of never having thought of Harry, for that time. The names were closely connected, if I remember rightly, in the old days."

"Percy ought to be here, Gertrude, by this time,"

said Mr. Forrester, looking at his watch. "I hope nothing is wrong. It is"—

A quick step on the stairs—and, a moment after, Percy stood before them. There was a general rush towards him.

"How late you are, my good fellow," said Mr. Forrester. "I thought the coach had been upset."

"No, I am happy to say. My dear Aunt, how are you? And Ellie—if it *is* Ellie?" he added, taking her offered hand, and giving another to Mrs. Forrester.

"I don't wonder you say 'if it *is* Ellie.' Isn't the transformation astonishing, Percy?" said David.

"I have seen Ellie since you have," said Percy, looking into her face with a smile.

"But what has kept you in this way, Percy?" inquired Mr. Forrester. "Do you know that you are a full half hour late?"

"I am not aware that there is any particular cause for my being late, Uncle, excepting, perhaps, a heavily laden coach. But I am here now, and so far on my way to Wilton, Ellie."

"Percy, I feel hardly able to believe this evening's happiness," said Ellie. "Just see who there is in this room—and all going to Wilton to-morrow!"

"And going to have something to eat *now*, I hope," said Mr. Forrester. "Ah, it *is* a pleasant party, my little niece, and how much the pleasanter for your being amongst us, I will not say."

"Oh yes, of course," said Harry. "It would be nothing without that."

There was a general laugh at Harry's expense,

and thanks all round were tendered him for his *compliment*. He tried to apologize ; but, only making matters worse, Ellie led him to his place, saying he had better come and persuade others to sit down at the tea-table, and let them all forget his bad manners, in refreshing themselves there.

" Five o'clock to-morrow morning, ladies, remember, the coach starts," said Mr. Forrester, as his wife and Ellie took their bed-candles. " I shall order coffee and rusks to be brought to our rooms at half-past four, and we shall get breakfast on the road. We are all pretty good risers, I believe ? "

" Only just in time, Mademoiselle," were the words which met Ellie's ear as she entered the sitting-room the next morning, where the others were already assembled.

" I *am* in time, though, Uncle ! and that is punctuality, you know. Do you think I could be late on such a morning as this ? "

The two ladies took their places inside the coach with Mr. Forrester and Harry ; the others mounted to the top. There was a short whistle, a crack of the whip, and away they started.

" Off !—off ! " said Ellie, catching her young " brother's " hand. " Harry, do you realize that we are on our way to Wilton ? "

It was a long journey, on a hot day, in a comfortable vehicle. No one could cheat himself into forgetfulness of these facts. But there were books and

pleasant chat to relieve the weariness of the way, and, being unfettered by the presence of strangers, the ladies took off their bonnets, and the gentlemen cast aside their travelling-caps. This brought to Ellie's mind a day far back in her life, when she had before travelled that road, with her face towards Stockington, and had watched with so much interest the orderly proceedings of the Arnolds. Where were they now? In two days more they would sail from England, most probably never to return. Where was little Willie?

But Ellie was too full of present happiness to be greatly moved even by such memories as these.

The twilight of the long summer day was fading fast when the coach reached the point where travellers for Murfield take another route. There was a stoppage. Any passengers for Murfield? Yes. And several minutes were occupied in getting down luggage and changing horses.

Ellie thought, with torture, of what Percy must be suffering, and there was a general restless silence till they started again.

On—on, for thirty miles more. The coach rolled under the old gateway, and Ellie and Harry were in Stockington again.

Two gentlemen were seen waiting at the inn-door as the coach stopped; Dr. Forrester and Mr. Woodford. Inquiries and introductions and dismountings were all jumbled strangely together, for Mr. Woodford knew none of the arrivals but David and Harry. Ellie took her father's arm, and, with Harry on the other side, the three followed the rest of the party to Castle-place.

"Is Mama at Dr. Forrester's, Papa?" asked Ellie, as soon as they were in marching order.

"No, my dear; that would not have done for her."

"But she is better, Papa, is she not?" inquired Ellie anxiously.

"Why, yes, yes. She certainly is. But she has not been strong all the spring. You must come and be her right hand, Ellie."

"That is what I am looking forward to, Papa. Are you staying at Dr. Forrester's to-night?"

"No-oo. Do you think their house is made of India-rubber? Just see the party you have brought. You are to stay here to-night, though."

"Well, I shall be glad to see Wilton first by daylight. What time are we going to-morrow, Papa?"

"Mrs. Forrester settled it all with your mother. I think I heard it was to be the afternoon. But she can tell you."

As these last words were spoken, they stood on the steps of Dr. Forrester's house. In an instant the door was opened, and then such a Babel of tongues ensued, that it was difficult to understand anything. When it had a little subsided, those who had been longest separated had opportunity to take notes of the changes in each other since they last met.

Ellie saw that both Dr. Forrester and his wife looked older. Maud was the decided woman now, composed and grave in her manner, but far more genial than heretofore.

While Ellie was occupied in scanning her old

friends, their eyes were equally busy with herself; and remarks on her own and Harry's wonderful attainments in height since they last stood together in that room were circulated freely.

Mrs. Forrester made a move to conduct the lady travellers upstairs, saying they must be content with a hasty toilette, for that supper was ready, and that she was sure an early retirement would be acceptable to them all. Maud drew Ellie's arm in hers, and the two elder ladies went away together.

There was so much to hear and to tell, however, that the "early retirement" soon vanished from the mind of every individual round the supper-table, and, before the meal had fully closed, Mr. Woodford rose, saying he must go, or he should keep Mr. Tiverton's servants up.

"Then, Papa, I shall not see you again for some time?" said Ellie, following her father into the hall.

"No, I go to London first, and then probably to the north again. Take care of your mother, Ellie, and don't let her over-exert herself."

Ellie found the ladies saying "Good night" when she returned to the dining-room.

The door had no sooner closed on their retreating figures, than Harry, eagerly addressing Dr. Forrester, said—

"Father, do tell me what you think of Ellie?"

"There can be but one opinion on that point, my boy, I should suppose," said Mr. Ambrose Forrester.

"Yes; but, Uncle, I want to hear what my father's impression is. He has not seen her for four years, you know."

"True. Well, Doctor, what is your impression?"

"I think I never saw a more beautiful expression of countenance."

Harry's smile told the pleasure he felt in his father's verdict.

"I was so astonished, Father," said David—"quite taken aback by her appearance. I had never thought of Ellie's growing up into a pretty girl."

"Had you not? Oh, I always knew that must be with those delicate features. But I was doubtful whether the expression would not be irritable. But that tells of gentleness and feeling finely tempered now."

"The result of the best influence on a sensitive mind," said Mr. Forrester. "I say, Harry! what are you going to do when some fine young fellow comes to carry off this Wilton lily?"

"Oh, Uncle! Don't, pray, make any such suggestion as that. We are going to be children again."

"And when Ellie is permitted to become a woman, she must make a vow of celibacy for Harry's sake," said David.

"She used to tell me she should arrange for me to live with her," said Harry.

The simplicity of this speech produced a burst of laughter at Harry's expense, which caused him to look quite crestfallen and disconcerted.

"I fear there is other work in store for Ellie before she makes any arrangements connected with that change," said Dr. Forrester.

"What do you mean, sir?" said Percy, hastily.

"I mean that I fear her first duty will be to nurse her mother."

"Indeed!"—and "I'm sorry to hear that," were uttered in different tones by each listener.

"Why, David, I thought she was getting better?" said Mr. Forrester.

"I do not think so, and I am convinced *she* does not, though she has never said that, or anything approaching to it, to me, or to any one else that I know of. I talk little about this to your mother, boys, remember, nor ever say *anything* to indicate that I consider the case hopeless. Mary Woodford's death would be terrible to her."

"My poor Ellie!" said Harry. "What would she do?"

"Well, my boy, my opinion is not infallible. It may all be better than I fear. Of course Ellie herself must hear nothing to excite her fears."

"*Certainly* she must not, poor child!" said Percy.

Parting salutations were now exchanged, and soon the household had sunk to repose.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AR into the following day the table at Castle-place remained spread with the morning meal. When Ellie made her appearance in the dining-room, the hands of the clock pointed to eleven. Percy and David only were in the room, and both were engaged with the newspaper.

"Well, fair lady, are you ashamed of those hours?" said David, rising to meet her, and pointing to the clock.

"Not for once. I wanted to feel rested and bright for going home, so I am glad to have slept long on that account. Are you and Percy quite renovated?" she inquired, turning to the latter. "Your journey must have been worse than ours. You were so much more exposed to heat and dust."

"But we were better able to bear it, therefore I suppose our lot was pretty equal. So this is the day for going to Wilton, Ellie?"

"Yes," she said, with a happy smile. "It has come at last. Will you go with us, Percy? Do! I'm sure you will think Wilton prettier than ever."

"I waited for permission, not entreaty."

"Permission ! Oh, Percy, you must not say that. I have done nothing but receive invitations for the last four years ; now I have a *right*," she added, gaily, "to give them. And by way of an immediate exercise of my prerogative, I give *you*, Mr. Percy Forrester, a general invitation to Wilton for the whole term of your stay at Stockington. Mama will second it heartily, I know. David is at home there already."

"I shall not be slow to avail myself of the invitation, Ellie. I may, then, consider myself engaged there for to-day ? "

"Yes, certainly."

"At what time ? "

"We are to be at Wilton about six o'clock, when the heat of the day is a little past. David, when shall you come ? "

"Soon, I hope. But not to-day. We must exercise discretion as well as prerogative, or we shall overpower Mrs. Woodford."

"Why, David, you know of old that Mama likes nothing better than having a goodly company gathered in the large parlour. Just remember how we used all to meet there, and the Tiverton family, and the Stanfields besides."

"Yes ; but I thought if Mrs. Woodford were somewhat of an invalid, a large number might not be desirable."

"Oh, thank you, David ; but that is a needless scruple. Dear mother *has* been poorly, I know ; but she is almost right again now."

The entrance of Harry and his mother prevented the necessity for any reply to this remark ; and

they being followed immediately by Maud with her aunt and uncle, the late meal began. The dinner hour was fixed during the progress of breakfast, and it was agreed that those who were going to Wilton should start at half-past five in the afternoon.

"Will that be soon enough," inquired Ellie, "for us to reach Wilton at the time Mama will be expecting us?"

"You will drive, of course, so half an hour will fully suffice."

"Drive! How?"

"Ah, Ellie!" said David, "you don't know, I see, what progress has been made in civilization or luxury (which you will) since you left Stockington. Not only has the town been lighted with gas, but Mr. Tiverton has set up his close carriage, and Dr. Forrester his open one, to say nothing of a discreet vehicle driven by Mr. Stanfield and his lady."

"Indeed! I am greatly impressed—with the last announcement more particularly. Does Mr. Stanfield drive? I should have thought he would be nervous."

"He need not be," said Maud; "his driving pace, like everything belonging to him, is slow and steady."

"And is Mrs. Stanfield just what she used to be, and as fond of Freddie as ever?"

"Just the same in all things, only she has recently acquired an accomplishment of which her husband is very proud. She makes his artifices fly."

"Oh! then that shows me *he* is unaltered, in one

of his tastes, at least. Does the other still continue?"

"*Tea*, you mean? To which I reply emphatically—yes."

"Mrs. Forrester," said Ellie, "I think I ought to go and just peep at the Tivertons before dinner. I need not be long gone."

"I think so too. But if my little *Ellie* does not wish me to change that term for 'Miss Elspeth,' she must not call me Mrs. Forrester again."

"May I call you 'Aunt,' as that dear lady there has made me do?"

"Certainly."

"Remember," said Dr. Forrester, "that at what time you take my wife for 'Aunt,' you must take also the old doctor for uncle."

Ellie went behind the "old doctor's" chair, and, kissing his cheek, told him she could not love him better for doing so than she had always done when to her he was only Dr. Forrester.

Ellie and Harry were warmly received by the Tiverton family, and were assured that one and all took most kindly their paying this visit before they had even seen Wilton or Mrs. Woodford. There was but little change amongst them. Emma was most altered—a full-grown woman now, and more like her elder sisters in manner than heretofore, but kind and pleasant, and evidently delighted to welcome her young friends.

The day wore on, and Ellie glanced furtively at the clock as the ladies rose from dinner.

"Not quite time yet," said Percy, smiling.

"I did not mean to have been seen doing that. You have very quick observation, Percy!"

"Sometimes. But why did you wish to conceal the fact that you were looking at the clock?"

"Why, it is not quite polite, you know, to be in a hurry to leave one's friends."

"If I did not hold that politeness is of most importance where we are most at home, I should take exception at that word, Ellie, as applied to yourself in my father's house."

"Oh, but you are so sure of my love for every one here, that you would not think I meant stiffness by politeness."

"I *do not* think so. And as I know you are equally sure of our sympathy in your longing to get home, I will give you London time to a moment."

Dr. Forrester had arranged who should go to Wilton without giving Ellie reason to suspect he had any motive for restricting numbers; and at the time appointed the prescribed four prepared to get into the carriage. Maud was about politely to place Ellie in front with her eldest brother. Ellie, however, declared she must sit with Harry. The point was yielded, and the two became engrossed in eager question and answer together, as each familiar spot was passed.

"Harry!" cried Ellie, as they drew near the river-side. "There is quite a crowd on the Wilton bank. I can see Mama, and Freddie, and Sarah, and, I do think, Farmer Smith. And there are the village children, with garlands and nosegays, all standing at the edge of the river."

Poor Harry's face was stretched forward as if he

longed to see what Ellie saw. But he gave no expression to the wish, only a smile was on his lips, and, "Tell me all—everything," escaped them.

Ellie rapidly sketched the scene.

There lay the village in its own unrivalled beauty. At the river edge, waiting for its expected freight, rocked the old ferry-boat, now gaily decked with flowers, while from its stern floated a blue flag, bearing "Welcome Home" as its motto. Job himself, in his Sunday best, and wearing a great breast-knot of roses, tied with blue ribbon, was smiling and touching his hat beside it. On the opposite bank stood Mrs. Woodford, waving her handkerchief. Farmer Smith and his wife were near her. Freddie, with a garland over one shoulder, and a blue rosette on his hat, was at his mother's side, holding Sarah's hand. All carried bunches of flowers, and the village children wore garlands like Freddie's.

The greetings which followed the landing hardly require description. Ellie could trace no look of illness in her mother's face—a joyful fact to her. Freddie she thought more beautiful than ever, as he stood holding Mrs. Woodford's hand; upright, with chin drawn in as if he were determined to be dignified on so important an occasion, and casting, from time to time, rather awe-stricken glances at the gentleman stranger.

"Where is Grandpapa, Mama?" inquired Ellie, after the first greetings with the village friends were over. "I expected to have seen him amongst you all."

"He could not be persuaded that it would be safe

to leave the house unguarded. And as we all wished to bring our welcome down to the river-side, he stayed at home. You will see him there."

Mrs. Woodford then proposed that they should go to the house. The children ran forward, and by the time Ellie had arrived at her home, they had ranged themselves in a row outside the low wall which encircled the lawn.

"Harry, I must come to you again," she said, springing to his side. "Look, you can see it all. The honeysuckle is in full bloom. The long shadows are on the lawn. And there is a fairy feast spread under the mulberry-tree—fruit, and flowers, and loaves (from Smith's Farm, I'm sure). There are the yellow swans, too!—no one but Mrs. Smith could have made those. The house looks just as it used, Harry. Windows and doors are open, and I can see quite through the passage to the old yew-trees and the orchard. My rose 'céleste' is covered with blossoms, and has grown so much! And the old mulberry-tree forms a thicker shade than ever."

Old Mr. Woodford was now seen coming from the house, and Ellie ran to him, kissed him affectionately, and inquired if he did not think Wilton the sweetest place he had ever seen.

"Have we said too much in its praise, Percy?" she added, turning to him.

"That could hardly be, Ellie. It is indeed as beautiful as you have said."

"Come with me, Percy, into the house. You must see it all. And then once more—once more, Harry! the seat under the mulberry-tree. Look, this is the large parlour. Oh," she exclaimed,

stopping suddenly, "there is a new piano—a square one, Harry—so handsome!"

"That is Dr. Forrester's present to you on your return, Ellie," said Mrs. Woodford.

"For me?" she exclaimed. "How can I ever show my gratitude to such loving friends."

"We do not doubt the gratitude, my dear child. I hope we have a like feeling ourselves to our Heavenly Father, that for four years His preserving mercy has been over us, and that our children, in health and bloom themselves, find their long-forsaken homes unchanged."

There was a slight flush on the cheek—a little movement of the delicate nostril—a trifling hesitation in the voice, in uttering the last word. Percy marked it all; but Ellie's heart was full of joy, and he saw that it passed unnoticed by her.

"Oh, Mama! it is happiness and blessing indeed. Such a home, and such friends! Now, Percy, look into the dining-parlour. Does it not seem made for happy people? See how the honeysuckle *will* intrude even inside the window; and then direct your eye past the honeysuckle to all that loveliness beyond."

"Well," said Mrs. Woodford, when the praise bestowed on the beauty of the scene came to a pause, "I think, Ellie, you had better run up to your 'nest' now, and cast off your walking-dress. Our friends will be expecting us under the mulberry-tree."

Ellie ran up to her room. Here again she stood still in admiration. All new and spotless white were the draperies. The furniture was freshly

painted, and in the window stood a pretty china vase filled with her own roses. She was turning from the window when her eye fell on a small packet sealed and directed—"To Ellie, from her father." She broke the seals, and found a Bible exquisitely bound. In the opening page her father's hand had written,—

"To my dear child, in remembrance of February, 18—, from her affectionate Father."

Of all the welcomes Ellie had received, this was the most valued. She could hardly realize that those words were intended for herself.

"My guide, my instructor, even unto death," she whispered, "I shall love best to read my Heavenly Father's message from my earthly father's gift."

All was movement on the lawn when Ellie returned there. Mrs. Smith was making the tea, and Sarah and Rachel were bringing more dishes from the house to the already well-stored table, while Freddie was "helping" Farmer Smith to fetch chairs from within. The children were playing in the churchyard, making echoes answer from the grove to the sounds of their joyous voices. Villagers were gathered in groups about the lawn.

"Why, Mr. Smith!" said Ellie, as he was cutting vigorously away at a plum cake (after having sacked kitchen and dining-room of their chairs), "I'm quite frightened at the quantity of cake you have brought—I fear your wife and Polly must have had hard work?"

"Oh, we had nothing to do with all this, my de—, Miss Ellie I mean."

"No, it is not to be Miss Ellie. I like 'my dear' best."

"But I couldn't be so bold as that, my —— Miss ——, it was quite a slip my beginning it. I've been trying for weeks past to get perfect in saying 'Miss Ellie' and 'Master Harry' against when you came back, now you are such a grown-up young lady and gentleman."

"But our hearts are not grown up, Farmer Smith. We have come back to be children, as in that sweet summer-time when we first went to your farm. It is all as fresh in our memories as if it had happened this year—your own and dear Mrs. Smith's kindness, and all our happy days."

"Well," said the Farmer, hastily brushing his hand across his eyes, "I've heard tell that going to London makes people proud, and gives them fine ways. But if *this* is what it does, I say the more that goes the better."

"But, Mr. Smith, you were going to tell me about all this cake. Where did it come from?"

"Oh, that's your Ma's doing, my dear. She said all the village should rejoice when her Ellie came home. Ah! my dear, it made our hearts dance when she came back from London that time and told us about you. She said she thought we shouldn't hardly know her little passionate girl when we saw your face. Not that I ever thought you *was* passionate myself, and I should have known your face anywhere, because of the kind warm heart that's always speaking in your eyes."

"And so Mama provided this liberal supply of

cake ; and you and your dear wife spread this fairy feast all to honour us ! ”

“ And I’m sure I don’t know who there is in the world that I’d delight to honour more.”

“ Miss Ellie, darling,” said Sarah, coming hastily to where Ellie and the farmer stood, “ they want you at the other table. Tea is quite ready, and they are waiting for the Queen of the feast. I’ll serve the village people now, if you and Farmer Smith will go to the other table.”

Ellie obeyed, and found a place prepared for her and Harry together at one end of the table. Percy sat on her right hand, and her mother by Harry—Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Maud, old Mr. Woodford, and Freddie, making up the party.

As they sat chatting and enjoying the good cheer—Ellie every now and then calling Percy attention to the viands, and giving him an account of her own and Harry’s attempts to make the like in years gone by—a man rather bent with age appeared at the gate.

“ There he is, Harry ! There’s James ! We must go and welcome him,” said Ellie ; and, with an apology for leaving the table, they ran away together.

“ James looks older,” said Ellie, as she again seated herself at Percy’s side, after she had seen her old friend established in a comfortable seat, and had committed him to Sarah’s care for refreshment. “ He is more altered than any one else.”

“ Yes,” said the Farmer ; “ the old man is creeping on him fast. But what does that signify

to him ? The end of this life is only the beginning of a better to such as he ! ”

Ellie gave a glance of joy at the Farmer’s face. Those were words such as she had never heard from him before.

When tea was over, Sarah placed a chair by the window in the large parlour, and told Ellie she had better take Mrs. Woodford there. Her mistress might, perhaps, she said, be a little tired, and she would be able to see all that went on just as well from the window.

Ellie hastened to her mother directly. She thought now she *did* look weary. She was thinner, too, certainly. But her eye was bright, and there was a beautiful bloom on her cheek. There could not be much the matter, with such a cheek and eye as those.

Ellie, therefore, resolved not to be needlessly anxious ; but led Mrs. Woodford to the place Sarah had appointed, and then mingled again with her friends on the lawn.

An hour or two more, and lights in upper windows showed that the time for rest had come ; and Ellie was again reposing in her “ nest ”—her own sweet nest at *Wilton*.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IF ever a young heart was glad, Ellie's was so when her eyes opened the next morning, and her awakening senses realized that it was *home* they were conscious of.

No one but herself had yet come down, when she reached the breakfast-room. She, therefore, strolled out of doors, and sat down on a garden-chair on the Terrace, to await her mother's appearing.

She sat enjoying the morning air, and the beauty of the scene by which she was surrounded, till a child's step was heard in the hall; and Freddie, a moment after, fresh from his bath and Sarah's careful hands, ran towards her.

"How is my little brother this morning?" he said, kissing him tenderly.

"I'm very well," replied the child, looking earnestly into Ellie's face. "I've been to *Mamma* for my kiss, and to say my text; and she *says*, perhaps Percy will come again to-day. I'm *glad*. I like him. I hope he'll stay a long time. I *shall* ask him to go with me to the Farm, and see *my* pigeons. Mr. Smith says they're all mine, though

they stay there. And he says Mrs. Smith sha'n't have one of them killed without asking me."

"Oh, Freddie! I'm afraid Farmer Smith spoils you?"

"No, he doesn't. Sarah does not like me to be spoilt. I'm not cruel, Ellie. I don't kill flies and chickens and things now."

"No, darling. Mother and dear Sarah have taught you better, have they not?—have taught Freddie who made all living creatures so wonderfully,—and that it displeases Him to see them hurt. Now, tell me about Mama. How is she this morning?"

"She says she's better; but she looks very pale," said the child, shaking his head.

"I wish she would make haste and get well," he continued. "She used often to run about the garden with me, and go to Smith's Farm and Stockington, and help me to get flowers in the orchard. And now she can't do anything but walk quite slowly."

A pang shot through Ellie's heart, and for a moment the delicate bloom left her cheek.

"Will Mama be down to breakfast in a minute, Freddie?"

"No. She never comes down to breakfast now. Sarah makes it for us."

"I'm going to see her, Freddie."

With a heart full of foreboding, Ellie ran upstairs. But she called a smile to her face, as she entered her mother's room, and heard her say,—

"Come in, my Ellie. It does me good to hear the sound of your footstep again."

"I was afraid, Mama, you were over-fatigued

ELLIE; OR,

day. Freddie did not give me a good report
ou."

Freddie saw me before Sarah had made me
comfortable as I am now. I did feel a little
ed then."

"But you should not be tired in the morning,
Mother. That used not to be."

"Excitement is fatiguing, dear, however pleasur-
able. I shall be quiet for an hour or two, and then
you will see me downstairs. My absence is of no
importance now," she added, smiling; "for I have a
little housekeeper, who is going to relieve me of all
domestic cares."

"Your absence is of the last importance to me,
Mama," said Ellie, with a little tremble in her
voice. "But I *am* going to relieve you of all
trouble, if I can—going to be my mother's right
hand."

"I know it, darling. Now, remember, there are ~~one~~
three of our dear ones below, waiting for breakfast ~~just~~,
all looking to my Ellie for its being a cheerful, happy ~~py~~
meal."

Ellie took the hint intended, and hastened to the ~~the~~
breakfast-table.

Her spirits rose with her first attempt to act ~~the~~
part of mistress. She chatted pleasantly, and gave
amusing accounts of the doings at the Rectory ~~and~~
at Cowley. Old Mr. Woodford and little Freddie
both found that the most cheerful breakfast they had
had for many weeks.

It had not long disappeared when Dr. Forrester
arrived.

Ellie ran to meet him.

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"Dear Uncle David," she said, taking his hand in both hers, and smiling in his face, as she used the new title; "I am so thankful you have come."

"There is nothing the matter, I hope, Ellie?" he said, anxiously.

"I don't know. That is just what I want to ask *you*.—What," she added, abruptly, "do you think of Mama?"

"That she is a very sweet lady, and a dear friend of mine."

"Oh, yes, I know. But I mean, what do you think about her health? Are you quite satisfied, Dr. Fo——, Uncle, I mean, that she is getting better?"

"I suppose you find her tired this morning, after all her exertions to welcome a certain little daughter of hers? Why, Ellie, what festivities were going on here?"

"Yes. And the only thing which made it not *perfect*, was that you were not all with us. Dear Uncle David, how shall I thank you for your beautiful gift? It was so kind of you to remember me!"

"When I forget little Ellie; when I cease to think of all she has been and is to my poor boy; then I shall suspect I am growing a more graceless man than I even knew myself to be."

"Oh! don't speak as if I had ever done anything worthy of praise. Don't you know that light began to shine on my life the day you all came to Stockington? But my question is not answered yet. What do you really think of Mama?"

"That she wants just what she will now have—some one to relieve her from household cares, and to receive visitors when she does not feel equal to seeing them. The nursing department could not be better filled than it is by Sarah."

"Uncle, I wish you would tell me what plan will be most likely to expedite dear Mother's getting strong again."

"A quiet morning—fresh air—not too much talking—and no fatigue. Suppose you were to consider the 'great parlour' as especially her room till she gets better; let her sit there, and receive one or two of you, or all together, as her strength seems to permit."

"I am afraid, Uncle, all those preparations for our welcome fatigued her."

"She *directed*, certainly. But Mrs. Smith and the servants carried out her suggestions. You have heard, of course, how hard your *father* worked at the garlands and nosegays?"

"Mama said she had a delightful tale to tell me. But Sarah begged me not to ask her about anything last night. To think of Papa's having done such a thing, and for *me*, too!"

"Yes, indeed. It rejoiced us all. Well, now, I must see Mrs. Woodford. But first, Ellie, I wanted to say a word or two to you on another subject. You know, my dear, that you will have a busy time of it with all your new duties, so 'Aunt Ann' and I have been thinking that it will be better for Harry to come home soon—perhaps in a day or two—after you have had the opportunity of going round all your old haunts once more."

Before this speech closed, Ellie covered her face with her hands, and burst into such a flood of tears as caused her whole frame to tremble. More than once she tried to command herself and speak, but failed.

"Ellie, Ellie! I am grieved to have pained you so. Is such an idea new to you? Tell me what you had expected about it."

"I—I love to be busy. I would not lead an idle life—I am strong and well, and fit for exertion. But oh! Uncle, you will deprive me of all spirit for everything if you take Harry away. For four whole years we have both looked forward to the time when we should come back and live at Wilton again. And now—it was only yesterday our banishment ended, and you——"

Again the voice was choked with sobs.

"But, my dear child, you did not think that Harry could always live at Wilton?"

"Yes, I did. He must always live with me. No one knows his tastes so well. No one can make him see beautiful things as I do. Oh, Uncle! where I live let him live! His God *is* mine. Let naught but death part him and me."

Dr. Forrester was too deeply touched by this speech to reply immediately.

"But, Ellie," he said, at length, "can you have considered? This may do for a while now, if your parents have no scruple. But have you ever reflected that a day *may* come when you will be asked to share some other home. The wrench to Harry would be worse then than now."

"I will never share any home," said Ellie, pas-

sionately, "where Harry is not as welcome as myself. The strong ties of childhood's love are not so easily broken! Don't, dear Uncle, don't make my coming back sorrow instead of joy by taking him from me."

"Well, Ellie, I must have some talk with your parents on this subject."

"No, Uncle—you must leave that to me. I will choose some fitting time for speaking of it to Mama, and I will write to Papa directly, and tell him all my heart about it. I *can* do that now," she added, with a bright smile.

"Well, you shall be permitted the first turn, at all events. Now I must go to my patient."

"Mama," said Ellie, on returning to her mother's room, after the doctor's visit, "you are to rest quietly till the afternoon to-day, and then you are to lie on the sofa in the great parlour, and I am going to play and sing to you."

"But, my dear, I asked Percy Forrester to bring his aunt and uncle and David here, to spend the afternoon."

"That is postponed. But if you are really rested by to-morrow, they will come then."

"I hope so. I much wish to be introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose Forrester."

"What do you think of Percy, Mother? Do you remember I tried to describe him to you when I was a child? You will not say that I exaggerated, I think?"

"No; he is charming."

"And now there must be no more talking—I have exceeded already." And imprinting a kiss on

her mother's cheek, Ellie hastened away, as she said, to seek and make herself agreeable to her "party" of gentlemen.

Old Mr. Woodford's delight was to get possession of some book of seafaring adventure, and to wander about, sitting down in shady nooks to con it when he pleased, relieving his literary pursuits by gossip with the villagers. Ellie now, therefore, procured a favourite volume, inquired a little about it, and, having seen the old gentleman walk off with it, she and Harry determined on going round amongst their old friends in the village.

When Ellie had seen her mother's head laid on her pillow that night, she at once began a letter to her father. Thickly the lines followed each other ; there was so much to be grateful for—there were so many hopes and fears about her mother and Harry to be confided ! Sarah had more than once to remind Ellie of the flight of time, before she could be persuaded to bring her letter to a close.

A day of perfect quiet had the happiest effect on the invalid. It was followed by a refreshing night ; and when Dr. Forrester paid his visit the next morning, he decided that his brother's and sister's visit need not be longer postponed.

Ellie had just seated her mother in readiness by the great parlour window that evening, when she saw her guests arriving—uncles, aunts, Percy, Maud, and David.

"Percy and I thought," said Maud, when there was a little lull in the greetings, "that we ought not to come, Ellie, as we were the privileged members of the family on Wednesday ; but when

Papa brought your message this morning, Percy's good resolves vanished before the attractions of Smith's Farm, and of course I could not consent to be left at home alone."

"I'm so glad I happened to mention it to Dr. Forrester. I should have been disappointed indeed if Percy had not been with us. But how did you come? You did not walk, I hope, this warm afternoon?"

"No. Mr. Tiverton is as generous with his carriage as with everything else. He found we were all coming, and would send a detachment of us in that luxurious vehicle of his."

When tea was brought to a conclusion, Dr. Forrester said—

"If any one is going to Smith's Farm it is time to start, I think."

"Well, who will go?" said Ellie. "Percy, you have promised. Would you like to go with us, Uncle Ambrose?"

"I am sure I should."

It being settled that these were to make up the party, Ellie ran to put on her walking-dress, and the Smith's Farm detachment of her guests proceeded with her and Harry to the ferry.

There, to their surprise, they found the farm boat, and a stalwart youth, whom Ellie remembered as Mr. Smith's cow-boy in past years, waiting to pull them up the stream.

"Oh! that is delightful!" said Ellie. "How kind of Mr. Smith!—I sent this morning to say that we were coming, and this I know is done to show how glad they will be to see us. Now, Harry, give

me your hand. You have not forgotten how to step into the boat, I'm sure!" And, leading him safely to his place, Ellie seated herself by his side, and was followed by the two other gentlemen.

For some time after the boat was moving over the water she sat in deep silence, which no one disturbed till she broke it herself by saying—

"It all looks just as I wished you to see it, Percy. How thick and rich those trees are! What a gorgeous evening sun! It is not quite as it was the day that you and I first saw it. The trees were turning then, and the sunshine had a paler hue, and I was very sad!"

"I had no brother then!" she added, clasping Harry's hand; "and our darling Willie was just taken away. Oh! Percy, if it were not that I met you then, I could not bear to think of that day. And how little I then supposed we should ever meet again!"—"Here we are!" she exclaimed joyfully, "at the mooring-place, Harry, under the great walnut-trees, and amongst the fairies! There are the dear farmer and his wife coming out to meet us, and Polly and old James following. Now, Percy, you must give yourself up to our guidance for the rest of the evening."

Right hearty was the welcome of the farmer and his wife, while Polly's round, shining face assumed its broadest smile.

"Farmer Smith," said Ellie, "I'm going to show young Mr. Forrester all our old haunts. I shall go about just as I please—just as we used in the happy days of old. Percy, I need not introduce you to the walnut-trees; you know them. There was our

bedroom" (pointing to an upper window half lost in the shadow of the great tree). "Just inside stands the little table, and on it are lying the great 'Book of Martyrs' and 'The Pilgrim's Progress.' I know every inch of it all!" she continued, enthusiastically. "Harry, it is not altered. You can see it now just as it was nine years ago, when we wore pinbefores, and learned to wash and bake."

"And to burn your poor little fingers on ironing-days," said the farmer, laughing. "Well, it's good, to be sure," he added aside to Percy, "to hear a sweet young creature like that, who might from her looks be the finest lady in the land, not ashamed to remember the days she spent with us humble folk."

"I think, Mr. Smith," said Percy, "that if we could deprive Miss Ellie of the remembrance of Smith's Farm, we should take from her one of her greatest earthly pleasures."

"And I'm sure you would take one of my greatest pleasures from me, if I had to give up thinking of their visits to it. I b'lieve I was as happy a'most as they were themselves; and I used to look at them sometimes, and think, 'I wonder, now, when you grow up, if you'll be ashamed to notice a poor man;' and here, the first thing when she comes home, all fresh from her fine London school, she puts her little white hand in mine, and kisses my wife as hearty as if she were her mother, and talks about '*dear*' Smith's Farm."

"They have warm hearts, both of them, Farmer, certainly. But I should think but poorly of either

if they could easily forget the kindness they received under your roof."

"Your *tête-à-tête* must come to an end now, Percy," said Ellie, leaving Mrs. Smith, and going to his side, "or you will see nothing. Let us go round to the farmyard, and into the kitchen. They are filled with pleasant memories for us, and we must call them up for your benefit as well as our own."

So full of "pleasant memories" the old scenes were found to be, that twilight was deepening fast before Ellie and her friends could persuade themselves to leave them.

Sauntering homewards amongst the trees by the river-side, their converse naturally took its tone from the stillness and the shadows. When they reached home they found Maud and David seated under the mulberry-tree, Freddie hunting for glow-worms, and lights in the great parlour showing Dr. Forrester and the elder ladies in conversation there.

"I must go," said Ellie, "and sing Uncle David one song to my piano. I dare say we may be admitted there now. I will just run and see how Mama is."

Ellie cast a glance at her mother's face. It did not look weary; and, taking courage from this symptom, she whispered to Dr. Forrester. A nod of assent was given to her question, and she forthwith conducted her companions to the great parlour.

"You must hear the tones of your beautiful present, Uncle," she said, as she opened it. "Which do you prefer, vocal or instrumental music?"

“Vocal, by all means—at least as a beginning.”

Dr. Forrester had not yet heard Ellie's voice. Harry had told him how rich it was, but he was evidently unprepared for sounds so beautiful as those which now greeted his ear. Again and again he asked for their renewal, till at last his wife said that Ellie's voice was charming him away from every duty ; for there was his patient wanting her bed sadly, and all his family waiting for marching orders.

CHAPTER XL.

ELLIE became less anxious about her mother as she watched her from day to day. She longed to see her resume her old habits ; but when she hinted this to Dr. Forrester, his only reply was, "Patience, Ellie ;" from which word she drew large draughts of comfort, assuring herself that it was *only* patience that was needed. But for this—this one care, which never would quite be laid to rest, all, all was sunshine.

Day after day passed, and Ellie's letter to her father was still unanswered. It must be confessed that in the midst of her present happiness and constant occupation it was half forgotten. Nearly three weeks elapsed before the reply came. Then the silence was accounted for. The letter had been mis-sent, and had made a journey to Ireland before reaching its destination.

This was the first letter Ellie could remember to have received from her father. So kind it proved, that it was blotted with tears before she had half read it through.

It said that the writer had long resolved that never by any act of his should Ellie and Harry be

downstairs, and we will sit with her in the great parlour, and you shall read to us."

"Uncle," she said, as Dr. Forrester entered at that moment, "I have invited a friend to spend the day ; and I want you to come in the evening—all of you, and let us have tea once more under the mulberry-tree."

"Suppose I put my veto on this plan of yours, Miss Ellie," he said, kissing her affectionately.

"Ah ! but you will not, I am sure, when you see Mama. Do come to-night, Uncle ; I want to see *you* particularly," she whispered ; "I cannot talk to you now."

Dr. Forrester cast a quick glance at Percy, and then back to Ellie. It seemed that he did not see what he had half expected in either face. But he gave the promise she desired.

Converse cheerful and holy—meet for the lips of one whom sickness warned to stand prepared with lamp well trimmed, and beautiful on those of the young and fervent-hearted—filled the morning hours of that quiet day.

The afternoon brought the whole family from Castle-place, and the evening passed as many others had done, and as Mr. Forrester declared many more must do before he found his way back to Ferndale, though Percy *would* choose to break up the party by fancying that Springfield could no longer do without him.

During the evening, Ellie drew Dr. Forrester aside.

"Well, Ellie, you have a secret to tell me ?" he said, looking somewhat doubtfully into her face.

"It is only a secret from Harry, Uncle. I told Percy and Mama all about it this morning."

"Oh, indeed!" was the reply, in a surprised tone.

"Yes. I have heard from Papa, and I want you to read his letter."

Dr. Forrester took the letter, read, and returned it to Ellie's hand.

"Are you satisfied now, dear Uncle? Not anxious any longer to take Harry away?"

"I do not at present wish to do so."

"But promise me that you will never say anything about it again."

"I am not in a position to make that promise now. But if, this day three months, you still wish it, and will ask me again, I may be able to give you a decided and a final answer."

"How very mysterious!" said Ellie, laughing. "Let me see. This is the 20th of July. So, on the 20th of October, the oracle will speak! But I consider it settled now. I am so thankful that it is so without Harry's having had one painful thought about it."

Ellie felt sad, and grew more silent as the evening advanced. Still she resolved that her mother should perceive no cloud. It was only those who observed her as closely as some who were present did, who detected that Ellie was not quite herself.

"I shall come and say good-bye to-morrow, Harry," said Percy, as he shook his brother's hand at parting, "some time between lunch and dinner, I think—three o'clock, or thereabout, probably."

Next morning the family in Castle-place held a

parliament at their breakfast-table, at which it was decided that Percy should go early to Wilton, and ask Mrs. Woodford to spare Ellie and Harry to spend the day with them, and to let the farewells be spoken in the town. He was to take the carriage, and bring them back with him.

Percy arrived at Wilton before eleven o'clock—much earlier than he had designed the evening before. His first inquiry was for Mrs. Woodford.

She had had a good night, and was as comfortable as she ever felt at that time of the day.

"Would Miss Ellie and Mr. Harry be soon back?" (Freddie, whom Percy had seen on the lawn, had reported them absent.)

Rachel knew they would be back to dinner, but had not heard how long before.

Percy then sent his message of invitation up to Mrs. Woodford, and receiving a favourable reply, he said he would sit under the tree with Master Freddie till his brother and Miss Ellie should return.

Freddie was deeply absorbed in the manufacture of some oars to a boat which Job had made for him. Percy admiringly watched the boy's eager busy face for some time, and then said to him:—

"Well, Freddie, and what do you think of your sister Ellie, now she has come home again?"

Freddie looked quickly round.

"I love her. She's a *pretty* girl."

"But we musn't love people only because they are pretty, Freddie."

"I like her to look at me as she does with her eyes," said Freddie, cutting away at his oar.

"And do you know what it is that makes Ellie look like that?"

"Sarah says it's because she's good. Do my eyes look like Ellie's?" he added, raising his head, and blinking.

"I don't think they are like Ellie's," said Percy, smiling.

"Sarah says I've been good for a *long* time," replied the child, in a tone of disappointment.

"Well, I dare say the eyes will show it by-and-bye, if you *continue* good for a long time."

"Have you been good for a *very* long time?"

"I am anything but good now, Freddie."

"Ellie says you *are* good. She says there's nobody like you in the whole world; and so does Harry. *Isn't* there?" he continued, in a half-incredulous tone of inquiry.

"Not exactly, I suppose. But, Freddie, I think you must have misunderstood them. You did not hear exactly what they said, perhaps?"

"Yes, I did. I heard Harry ask Sarah if she liked you; and Sarah said 'Yes,' and then Ellie said 'Of course she does, Harry, for there isn't anybody like Percy in the whole world.' And Harry said 'No, there wasn't anybody so kind,' but he could not remember how you looked. *There* now, I've done them both! I've made the oars myself!" he exclaimed, triumphantly, holding up the little crooked bits of stick. "I must go and show Job."

So, putting on his hat hind part before, he darted out at the gate, without another word, leaving Percy to his reflections.

These were pleasing, it would seem, for there was

a smile on his lips, as he fixed his eyes abstractedly on the child's retreating figure. Taking his discarded hat, he presently strolled across the churchyard to the grove, where he continued to pace up and down till the sound of oars on the river caused him to pause and look searchingly through the trees, if haply a break in their thick branches might give him a glimpse of the boat which the oars were impelling, and of the freight which it bore—for he had heard from Freddie on his arrival that Ellie and Harry were gone on the river. A momentary glance at two persons seated there rewarded the effort.

With rapid strides he hastened to the landing-place.

"Harry, there is Percy come already," said Ellie. "We did not expect you till the afternoon," she continued, taking Percy's offered hand, "or we would not have been away." Then looking in his face with an expression in which surprise, inquiry, and hope were all struggling together, she asked, "Have you come to say——?"

"I have come to ask if you and Harry will go back with me to dine and sleep in Castle-place. My mother wishes to have us all together this evening. I have brought the carriage, and it waits your commands."

"Are you going to-morrow, then, Percy?"

"Yes. I have made no alteration in my plans," he replied, cheerfully.

Ellie was silent.

"Had you any reason to suppose I had done so?" he inquired, as she did not speak.

"No—but—I—I thought that perhaps you would have been a little sorry to go away, and that you might have come to say your journey was postponed; for, Percy, I never saw you look so happy before!"

There was a slight tremble in the voice, a little quiver of the lip, as these words were uttered.

"Well, Ellie, I have sometimes fancied I could trace in the eyes of a little girl I know, that it grieved her to see *unhappiness* in my face, and that she would gladly have lightened the cloud if she could."

"Oh, yes, and so indeed I would *most* gladly. But, then, to-day—I think I *had* expected to see you look graver," said Ellie casting a discomfited glance into Percy's still smiling face. "I am always so sorry, so very sorry to leave places and people I love. You are sorry, too, I'm sure, and it is only your power of self-control which enables you to seem cheerful."

"Perhaps, Ellie, I am not as sorry to leave Stockington as I feared I might be when I came there."

"Oh! then you have not enjoyed your visit as you expected?" she said, in tones of disappointment.

"Fully. Much more than I expected. My friends are all as kind, Wilton is as beautiful, Ellie's home as attractive, as my imagination had pictured them; and I suppose you will like me to add, that I think Smith's Farm as charming, and its worthy owners as loveable as you and Harry had represented them."

"Then, Percy, I *cannot* understand why you

should look happier to-day than on any other since you have been here."

"You said it was my power of self-control."

"So I suppose it must be," said Ellie, in tones in which Percy's ear could detect the slightest possible shade of vexation.

"No, Ellie. You give me credit for greater strength of character than I can lay claim to. Shall I tell you why I look and feel happy on a day which but for that reason would be to me all gloom?"

"If you will."

"I dare not be sure, but I *hope* I may be at Stockington again before long."

"Oh, Percy! is that true? I don't mind your looking happy then."

Harry had been walking at Percy's side in silence while this conversation went on, as much puzzled by the cheerful sound of his brother's voice as Ellie had been by his expression of countenance. He now joined Ellie in her exclamations of joy, and in eager questioning as to the when and wherefore.

"I must return to my solitary dwelling now," said Percy; "for I have already exceeded my intended term of absence; and though I am not quite dependent on this head of mine for daily bread, I must remember that man was not intended to lead a life of idleness."

"And when do you think you may be able to come again, Percy?"

"I have some friends to consult when I get back, Ellie, on a subject of deep importance to me. If

they receive a petition I intend making, favourably, I shall be at Stockington, by God's permission, again very soon."

Percy then asked Ellie if she felt disposed to accept his mother's invitation, and go back with him to dine and sleep at Castle-place. He had, he said, sent up the message to Mrs. Woodford immediately on his arrival, and she thought there was no objection.

"I don't know, really, whether I can leave my housekeeping duties, Mr. Forrester," said Ellie, gaily. "I am such an important person at Wilton, that it requires consideration before I can decide on leaving it."

"But as a friend requests it, who this time next week will be some two hundred miles distant, perhaps your important presence at Wilton might be dispensed with for one day, to give him pleasure?"

"Will it really give you pleasure for me to go to Stockington to-day, Percy?"

"I really think it will."

"Then," said Ellie, with a smile of delight, "I am afraid my estimation of the importance of my housekeeping duties will sink at least for this day, and that I shall accept the invitation, after all."

Ellie's first words, when they reached Castle-place and Dr. Forrester appeared at the door to assist her from the carriage, were:—

"Oh, Uncle! this is not going to be a sad parting, as I feared. Percy says he hopes to come back again soon. He has only to ask a favour of some

friends, and if they consent, he will return almost directly."

"And you hope they *will* consent?"

"Yes, indeed, I do, Uncle. Don't you?"

"Most fervently I do, Ellie."

CHAPTER XLI.

PERCY had been gone more than a fortnight. The intercourse between Wilton and Castle-place somewhat slackened with his departure; and although there were still meetings under the mulberry-tree and in the great parlour, they were neither as frequent nor quite so cheerful as when the Forrester family had been complete. The doctor made his daily visit to his patient, and Ellie would often meet him with the question, "Well, Uncle, has Percy written?" And sometimes, when the answer was still in the negative, a passing fear would visit her that his plea had been unsuccessful.

The season was unusually warm and dry; so oppressive sometimes, that Ellie and Harry now frequently took their book and work into the grove, and, creeping down the bank, would find a resting-place as near the river as possible, that a breeze, cooled by the water, might visit them refreshingly in their retirement. The turf on the lawn had become brown and slippery from long-continued drought. The flowers hung their heads as if exhausted from want of moisture. Every window

and door of the Manor-house stood open, and yet the invalid panted for air.

"There is nothing but the grove will do, this afternoon, Harry," said Ellie, one day, as they finished dinner, when the heat was even more oppressive than it had before been.

They soon found a pleasant spot which overhanging branches sheltered from the sun. Ellie sat listlessly looking on the stream, listening to the gurgling sound of the water amongst the roots of the trees. Harry let fall his basket-work, and listened too. Before long both were decidedly drowsy, and soon fell asleep.

Ellie knew not how long the slumber had lasted, when it was disturbed by a rustling among the underwood. She roused herself, and rose from her reclining posture. Harry did not appear to have noticed the sound, or perhaps thought it was made by his companion. Ellie herself, after a few moments of startled observation, being able to perceive no cause for alarm, was beginning to fancy she had been mistaken, and was settling again in her old place, when a floundering noise, as if some person were ineffectually attempting to stand upright, or to climb the bank, distinctly met her ear.

She started to her feet, and looked round ; and there, almost close to her, was a man, evidently intoxicated, attempting to clamber up the bank.

Ellie was too inexperienced to know that his condition was a safeguard to her, and, much alarmed, she said in a trembling whisper to Harry :—"Get up, dear, directly. I am going home. Harry, give me your hand quickly ! I will take our things."

The man had evidently been unconscious that any one was near. He looked round, at first with an expression of imbecile surprise, which changed to one of malignity when he realized that he was noticed ; and he seemed as if about to speak, moving closer to Ellie, with a threatening gesture. This look and movement, and *the sight of his face*, nearly deprived Ellie of her self-command.

She dragged Harry up the bank, and without answering one inquiry he put, ran through the grove and churchyard, almost pushed her companion through the gate, hurried him into the dining-room, and, sitting down, burst into tears.

Sarah, who had watched the young people from an upper window, coming to the house at such an unusual pace, went to them forthwith, and found Ellie nearly in hysterics. She waited patiently, only saying a soothing word now and then, till the sobbing became less violent, and her young mistress's attempts at speaking more successful.

"Well, my dear, it's very unfortunate," she said, at the close of Ellie's broken narrative, "that this man should have frightened you again. I've never seen him myself since that day in the park. I think you must be mistaken, Ellie ; about its being the same person, I mean."

"That's what you all said when I let Freddie fall. But I'm sure it's the same person ; though I don't know that *that* is of any importance, for one bad man is as much to be dreaded as another. Only, Sarah, what is so shocking to me is, that in spite of his wicked, horrid look, he does make me think

of—Papa! He did that day at Mill Cottage, and even in the park.”

“My dear! Such a common-looking man as that! I don’t see how he could be like your Papa.”

“Not like. I could not say that. But something in his face made me think of Papa directly. But, Sarah, I have frightened you. You look pale.”

“It’s so warm, my dear. I think we shall have thunder.”

“How is Mama this afternoon?”

“That is what I wanted to speak to you about, my dear. She feels the heat so much, that I thought it better to undress her, and lay her on the sofa in her own room instead of bringing her down. I thought if you would take care of *downstairs*, and let me stay up there alone with your Mama this evening, it would be better than for her to be talking at all. You see, it’s as much as *we* can do to bear the heat, and when any one is weak, of course they feel it more.”

Ellie asked the time, and said she would prepare herself for tea directly.

“I suppose we are not to wait for Papa, Sarah?”

“No, my dear. Your Mama thinks he will be late. You had better not say anything to Freddie or Mr. Woodford about your fright, lest they should mention it before your Mama, and I want to keep her quiet.”

Sarah’s anxiety on this point did not appear to Ellie as anything extraordinary. Her mother had been unusually languid for several days past, but this was accounted for by the heat.

But there was a new and formidable reason for

Sarah's caution to-day. As Ellie slept by the river-side, and while the faithful attendant kept watch over her mistress, she had seen a deep-crimson stain come over the white handkerchief which the invalid held to her lips. Sarah too well knew in how many cases that sign had a fatal meaning ; and trembling with newly awakened fear, she now exercised a double amount of care over her much-loved charge.

As evening drew on, every symptom appeared of a coming storm. Sudden gusts of wind shook windows, caused doors to slam, and blew up the summer dust in circling eddies over the village road. Birds flew anxiously about, as if knowing that shelter would be needed soon, and now and then a distant rumble in the sky was heard.

Mr. Woodford was late that night. All but Ellie had gone to their rooms before he arrived. He came in, looking tired. He was, he said, almost done up with the heat and his hard day's work. Ellie had intended telling him of her afternoon adventure, but seeing how fatigued he was, she resolved to say nothing about it till the morning. Sarah, for the same reason, abstained from increasing his anxiety for his wife by relating the event in the sick-room, which had so greatly added to her own.

Mr. Woodford had scarcely finished supper, when the storm burst forth with sudden and terrible violence. Freddie screamed, and Ellie, running upstairs, sat down at his bedside.

There was a fearful interval. No rain. The forked and incessant lightning was followed so instantaneously by peal after peal of thunder, that

it seemed as if the village were the centre of a battle-field. Each one of the household felt prepared for some terrible catastrophe. When, at last, the windows of heaven were opened, such a flood of rain came down, that drowning seemed well-nigh as imminent as destruction by lightning had been five minutes before. Great hailstones rattled against the windows, and the general warring of elements was fearful to witness.

Hour after hour the storm continued. There would be a lull for a short interval, and then a return. Such a night few could recollect.

As morning dawned, however, the tempest gradually abated. All but the invalid had been more or less unnerved by it. *She* lay, while the storm was raging around—one thin hand covering her eyes, the other clasped in that of her husband—the body quiet and composed; the spirit communing with Him who ruleth the raging of the storm.

“They shall not be afraid of the terror by night,” thought Ellie, as she kissed her mother’s tranquil brow before retiring to rest.

Morning returned. The clouds hung low and leaden.

The atmosphere was charged with heavy moisture, and scarcely a breath of air stirred. The lawn, usually so neat, presented a scene of sad disorder and devastation. The grass was covered with leaves and twigs, and broken branches torn from the mulberry-tree. Flowering plants lay beaten down, their blossoms soiled and crushed. The gravel was washed into little heaps upon the

turf, leaving furrows in the lately smooth path-way.

Ellie, who had slept later than usual, was roused by hearing Freddie's voice speaking in accents of entreaty in the passage:—

“Sarah, do take me to the Grove! I want to see how my bay looks, now it's been raining so. Just for one minute, please, dear Sarah!”

“If I can leave Mama, dear, we will see.”

Ellie was hastily dressing, to recover lost time, when her father came to her door, and said that Freddie was so importunate for Sarah to take him to the Grove, that he was going to finish his own dressing in her mother's room, that she might not be left alone, in Sarah's absence. He wanted his breakfast, he said, as soon as possible, for he must be off to the counting-house.

Ellie went down quickly to the parlour; and, having made preparations for breakfast, she knelt on the window-seat, and leaned out of the casement, awaiting her father's coming.

A few minutes only had passed, when she saw Sarah hurrying back across the churchyard—not as wildly as she herself had done yesterday, but at a pace which clearly showed something was wrong. Ellie ran out. Freddie looked flushed and angry, and his attendant very pale.

“What is it, Sarah?”

Sarah vainly tried to reply. She panted for breath, and fright seemed to render articulation impossible.

“What is it, Freddie?”

“Sarah wouldn't let me stay. She said I *must*

come back ; and I didn't want to come back. But she ran as fast as she could."

"Hush ! Freddie, dear ! There was some reason. Try to be a man, and bear a disappointment. Go into the dining-room for one minute. I will come to you directly. Sarah, come with me."

So saying, Ellie led the way into the large parlour.

"My dear," said Sarah, as soon as the door was closed, "there is something very shocking in the Grove."

"Oh, Sarah !"

"Yes. You know that little place, which Freddie calls his 'bay,' where those two trees stretch so far into the river, and let the water in between them ?"

"Yes—yes !"

"Well, there is where he wanted to peep down, because the roots of the trees make the water dash about very much when the stream is strong with heavy rain ; and Freddie always gets me to take him to see it. But when we got to the place to-day, he said it wasn't right ; and I saw there was something there ! You know how steep the bank is, just at that place ? I had hard work to scramble down, and when I got to the bottom—oh, Miss Ellie ! there I saw the body of a man !"

"How very dreadful, Sarah ! Perhaps it is the man who frightened me yesterday."

"That is what I thought of. His face was down in the water, but I could see a hand. I was so afraid Freddie would see it too."

At this moment Mr. Woodford's step was heard on the stair, and Ellie ran to call him :—

"Come here, Papa. We want you directly."

The tone surprised her father. But he obeyed, and listened to Ellie's tale of yesterday, followed by Sarah's more appalling one of this morning.

"Papa," said Ellie, at its close, "you remember that man who spoke to you in the Park the first time you took us there when we came to Stockington? I'm *sure* the man I saw in the Grove yesterday is that very person, and I expect it is he who is drowned."

Mr. Woodford turned pale. He asked Sarah to leave him with Miss Ellie, and to say nothing of what had happened, at present.

"Ellie, do you speak advisedly when you say that?"

"Yes, Papa. I am certain of it. The man looks older, and worse, if possible, than he did. But I'm sure it is the same who frightened me so much at Mill Cottage—the same we met in the Park."

"Then, Ellie, if that is true, and the person you saw yesterday is the one who is drowned, a very near relative of mine is lying dead in the river there!"

"Oh, Papa! How horrible! Who is it? A relative of *yours*?"

"I can't tell you now. I must go. Act like a woman, Ellie. Keep them all quiet in the next room, and send your mother her breakfast. Above all things, don't let her hear yet what has taken place."

Mr. Woodford hurried away, and Ellie went to the breakfast-table. In a short time, she saw her father, and several men from the village, striding across the churchyard.

"There's Papa!" said Freddie, darting up, "and Job,—and ever so many,—going to the Grove!"

"What can George be going into the Grove for, now?" said Mr. Woodford. "I thought he was in a hurry for his breakfast!"

"He was. But he heard that some mischief had happened there in the night, Grandpapa, and he is gone to see what it is."

"Oh, from the storm, I suppose! I'm sure that is no wonder. A more terrible night I never remember."

It was more than an hour before Mr. Woodford returned. He then went quietly to his wife's room, and told her what had happened, without then giving her any reason to suppose himself especially interested in the catastrophe; after which, he hastily swallowed some breakfast, and, while doing so, spoke of the distressing casualty which had just been discovered.

"And do they know who the man is, George?" inquired old Mr. Woodford, after the general expression of horror had subsided.

"No one seems to know," was the reply.

As Mr. Woodford was about to leave the house, he called Ellie aside.

"You know, my dear, of course, that there must be a Coroner's Inquest? I'm afraid, Ellie, you were the last person who saw my——, this poor

man, and that it will be needful for you to appear!"

"Oh, Papa," said Ellie, turning pale, "do spare me that!"

"I would, if it could be done; but, as far as I understand the matter, it can't. There's nothing formidable in that part, though, in such a place as this. The really painful thing is, that I fear you must see the body, that you may be able to say whether it is the same person who was in the Grove yesterday. Ellie, that man was once as fine a young fellow altogether as you could meet on a summer day. He was not only my relative, but my dearest friend. I can't tell you more now. But the fact that I know anything about him must on no account transpire. Just bear in mind that all you have to do with now is, whether or not this is the same person you saw in the Grove yesterday."

On the following day, the dreaded summons came. The afternoon was wearing away, when Ellie saw her father appear at the gate. She was sitting at the great parlour window with Harry. Old Mr. Woodford was playing with Freddie at the other end of the room. Ellie trembled so violently that at first she could not venture to rise. Mr. Woodford came to the door:—

"I want you for a few minutes, Ellie," he said. "Father, will you stay here with Harry and Freddie till we return?—Run, Ellie, and put on your bonnet, my dear!"

Running exceeded Ellie's capability at that moment; but she made what haste she could, and

followed her father. They were no sooner out of sight of the house, than he made her take his arm ; and, begging her not to yield to her present agitation, he led her to the little Inn on the Green.

A number of men stood about the door, and, to add to Ellie's alarm, they followed her as she entered. The hostess received and conducted them into the large room which overlooked the river. Waiting there, were the Coroner and a medical gentleman from Stockington, both well known to Ellie by sight. The former looked at her utterly colourless face, and suggested waiting that she might recover herself.

"I am quite ready," said Ellie, in accents scarcely articulate, and breathing audibly. And with some difficulty, she succeeded in replying to the questions put to her, encouraged at seeing that Farmer Smith was amongst the jurors, and that most of the surrounding faces were familiar to her.

"I fear I must ask you to go with us into another room," said the Coroner at last.

Ellie bowed, and was led through the kitchen to an outhouse.

One glance was enough. Even in death—and such a death!—there was that nameless resemblance to her father, which had at first struck her.

"It is the same," she said.

"You feel no doubt?"

"None."

"Do you know who the person was?"

"No. He was a stranger."

Ellie now seemed so nearly to have reached the fainting-point, that she was hastily committed to the care of the landlady, and told no more was required of her.

Searching inquiries were made, but no light was thrown on the dead man's name or home. Whether his death had been the result of accident or intention ; whether he had been exposed, yet alive, to the warring elements throughout that fearful night ; or whether, before the storm burst, he had already ceased to live ;—none ever knew.

Mr. Woodford "interested himself very kindly"—as all the village said—to procure decent burial for the dead man. With the little knot of men who had rescued the mortal remains from the water, he followed him to the grave.

It was towards the close of the week following the stranger's funeral, that Mr. Woodford informed his Stockington friends he had received intelligence of the sudden death of a near relative of his Mother. The family at the old Manor-house at Wilton appeared soon after in mourning garments.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE weather remained in an unsettled state for many days after the thunderstorm. When clear skies and unbroken sunshine returned, that change had passed on things external which tells that summer is insensibly being exchanged for autumn.

The air became fresh and invigorating. Mornings of mist brightened into noons of sunshine. The village children began to appear at the kitchen door with baskets of mushrooms, and wallfruit superseded the bright berries which had at first graced the feasts under the mulberry-tree.

The languor from which the invalid had suffered during the heat was mitigated by the change of atmosphere. She was soon able again to spend a considerable portion of the day downstairs. Often, too, leaning on Ellie's or her husband's arm, she walked about the garden. Even a row on the river made, again, a pleasurable change for her, when many a stalwart rustic would plead for the honour of taking the oars, and Ellie, sitting by her mother's side, would repeat long passages from favourite poets, zealously committed to memory in store for such occasions.

One September afternoon, when the friends returned from some cottage visits, Ellie left Harry on the lawn, and ran forward to the window of the large parlour to ascertain if her mother were awake. Mrs. Woodford lay on the sofa ; one hand shaded her eyes, the other held an open letter. Ellie stole to the door of the room, and opened it gently. Her mother removed her hand, and smiled.

"Nothing the matter, Mama, I hope?" inquired Ellie, anxiously.

"Nothing. I was going to send for you, Ellie. I have something to say to you."

Ellie threw off her bonnet, and knelt down by her mother's side.

"I have had a letter, Ellie."

"That is perceptible to my sense of sight, dear Mother," said Ellie, smiling, and kissing her mother's cheek.

"Would you like to hear who is the writer?"

"Doesn't my mother know what an inquisitive little person her daughter Ellie is?"

"Used to be. She has tutored that failing as successfully as others. But perhaps you can tell yourself who my letter is from?"

"Oh! Mama—from Percy? Has he succeeded? Is he coming? Has he told you anything about it?"

"*That* is my Ellie of seven years old. Three or four questions, and no pause between for answers."

"Then you see, Mother, *all* the failings have not been 'tutored.' So, to begin with this at once, I will ask one question only. It is an important one, though!" she added, archly. "Has Percy succeeded with his petition?"

"That is not yet decided."

"Is it not? I'm *sorry* for that. Then the rest of my questions may be withdrawn, for they are useless."

"I did not know that Percy's coming was so important to you, Ellie."

"Oh! Mama, how could it be otherwise? It is important to us all to have such companionship as his. You know how they all love him in Castle-place. It will be a great disappointment to them."

"*What* will be, my dear?"

"That Percy has not succeeded. For he distinctly said he should not come unless he did succeed."

"I have not said he was not *likely* to succeed, simply that he had not already done so. Who are the friends of whom this petition you speak of was to be asked?"

"That I don't know. Harry and I hoped it might be Mr. and Mrs. Chester, because we felt so sure with them he *would* succeed. But I fear it could not have been."

"You would not feel equal security that Mr. and Mrs. Woodford would be disposed to grant him a petition?"

"*You*, Mama—and Papa? I think now you must be joking. If it had been you, why should he have gone away at all when he could have asked you any day he pleased?"

"Perhaps the letter may explain that point, if you don't mind the trouble of reading it."

Ellie took the letter, and relaxed from a kneeling to a sitting posture on the ground, and began with a grave and thoughtful face to study its contents.

Scarce half the first page was scanned, when she started up, exclaiming—

“Mama! Oh, Mother! It’s not possible! It can’t be true! *Me?*”

“And why not you, my darling?”

“‘*Why?*’ Mother! Why, the greatest lady in the land might deem it an honour to have Percy’s love. And that he should have bestowed it upon *me!* ‘Oh, it’s too much! Mother, you will write to-day, and tell him that his petition is granted;—that, though your little daughter knows she is unworthy, she will strive to reach a standard more near his own.’”

“Perhaps it would not accord with my feelings, to make any such reply, Ellie.”

“Oh, Mama! don’t say that. I would not, *could* not, leave you, till you are quite well again. But health is coming, and——”

“Well, finish the letter, and then we will talk about it.”

Ellie’s tears were flowing fast, before the letter was concluded.

“Poor Percy! Oh, Mama! see what he says:—That I could make his darkened home bright and happy once more! That he has a heart full of love to give me, though it has been so crushed! To give *me!* ‘Oh, Mother! I don’t think you understand how great that wonder is.’”

“I really don’t think I do, Ellie! I suspect we look on the subject from quite different points of view. I am fain to believe, that, whatever Percy Forrester may be, my Ellie is a treasure he may well wish to secure.”

“ Ah, Mama,” said Ellie, smiling through her tears ; “ that is what Mothers always think. They are so blinded by affection, you see.”

“ Very good, Ellie ! ” said her mother, laughing. “ Excellent ! And there is no one else in this room, I suppose, who is blinded by her affection ? ”

“ Not blinded, Mother ! The *blindness* would be proved if I could not see that there is no one equal to Percy in all the world.”

“ As my youngest daughter has had such *world-wide* experience (to which I can make no pretension), it would be presumption in me to attempt arguing the point with her. So, perhaps, instead, she may prefer to read this ; ”—handing Ellie, as she spoke, a letter, which had been concealed in the folds of her dress.

Ellie was a long time shut up in her room, after taking the letter from her Mother’s hand.

At last, she came and knelt again beside the sofa, and whispered :—

“ Have I permission to answer this letter according to my will, Mother ? ”

“ Your Father, my dear child ! ”

“ Ah, yes ! I ought to have added that. But I thought your decision about it would be his ? ”

“ And so, I believe, it will. I trust the letter will be altogether acceptable to him, Ellie, as it truly is to me. You will not be kept long in suspense. Now, go to Harry. I feared he would suppose himself forgotten there, under the mulberry-tree, and I sent Sarah with a message to him.”

"Oh, thank you, Mama. But I have that for him here which will fully atone for my absence. Look there, Mother!" And she unfolded her letter, and pointed to a passage towards its close.

"I expected that," said Mrs. Woodford.

"And, Mother, it makes my cup of blessing to overflow. I must not keep such joyful news as that from him. I will not be long, Mama. By the time Sarah has all ready, I will be at your side again. You have waited longer for your tea already than is quite right."

Ellie ran across the lawn and sat down by Harry. "You thought me long gone, dear?" she said. "But I have something to tell you which will make up for it now. I have had a letter," she continued, "from — Percy. And, Harry! can you believe it? He says that he loves your sister Ellie, and asks her if some day she will share his home at Springfield!"

"Oh, Ellie! my sweet sister. Can you? Will you?"

"Those are not the right words, Harry. Where is the girl who would not think herself honoured in being selected by your brother Percy?"

"Ellie, I never thought of this. But now I see how fitting it all is. To *me* you and Percy stand alone. I never knew any one at all equal to either. And, Ellie, if you consent to share his home at Springfield, I shall think that home the happiest the world contains."

"I know, Harry, I know what you think of your sister Ellie. It is all too much—yet I rejoice that you should think it. But there is a passage in the

letter I have had from Percy which gladdens me even more than all the rest. Shall I read it to you ? ”

“ Will it be pleasant to you for me to hear it, Ellie ? ”

“ Aye ! *how* pleasant, my Harry, will it be ! ”

Ellie opened her letter once more, and read as follows :—

“ And now to my petition, Ellie, shall I add an assurance ? We have alike an interest in the matter, and I think I may. If my suit finds favour, remember *our* home must be *Harry's*, and Ellie his guardian and his eyesight still.”

Harry could not speak. His companion saw his hand tremble, and she grasped it in her own.

“ See now, Harry,” she said, “ what our Heavenly Father is ; how He does for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think. Our home is to be the same always, and that home *Percy's* ! ”

“ I have cause indeed, Ellie, to acknowledge a loving Father's hand ; but a poor blind man will, I fear, be a sad infliction in your happy home.”

“ ‘ Infliction ! ’ Now I am determined that on this day I will not give ear to one sad word ! All that must happen between us is that you must love me even better than before, because I am your brother Percy's own Ellie. Now come to Mama, and let us have a quiet tea with her, and soon we shall have Percy here again.”

The improvement in Mrs. Woodford's health, which resulted from the change of temperature, having made a daily visit from her doctor needless, it so happened that several days had passed

without a call from any of the family, just at the time Percy's letter arrived. This, Ellie decided in her own mind, was intentional. She now remembered several things her uncle had said which showed that he, at least, was acquainted with Percy's feelings.

The earliest post by which an answer could arrive from Mr. Woodford—who was now, as the reader has already imagined, again absent from home—brought a letter which was addressed to Ellie, and which filled up the measure of her happiness.

Now her own reply to the one she had received from Percy was indited, and Ellie began to turn those pages of life which so witchingly precede its graver lessons.

Ellie had only just despatched her letter, when she heard Dr. Forrester's voice below. She ran to meet him, and hurrying him into the great parlour shut the door, and turned on him a face so radiant with joy that he paused a moment to contemplate before he replied to the questioning eyes which were fixed on his own.

"Well, Ellie, you look quite brilliant this morning. What has happened?"

"Uncle, you promised that if on the 20th of October I should ask that Harry might live with me always you would give me a favourable answer. But we need not delay it so long. I want my answer now. You know I can see that Percy's home one happy day, if God permits, is to be mine; so give the promised promise, for Percy desires it as much as I do. Say *now* that you yield your full consent to Harry's home and ours being one."

"My dear little niece—*daughter* I mean—I give my full consent. I confess to having had many anxious thoughts in past months on this subject. But when Percy opened his heart to me, and watching Ellie closely, I saw how that sympathy in his early sorrow was all unconsciously to herself deepening into a tenderer feeling, I thought that then I was justified in making the promise I gave, and that if, when Percy's sentiments were made known to you, you still desired it, I would resign Harry to your own and his care always. Ellie, I cannot tell you how happy your face just now made me, or what joy I shall carry home to Castle-place when I tell them that you are really to be one of us in name as well as in affection."

"You are very good to say that, Uncle. But I fear I am but poorly fitted to be the wife of such a man as Percy."

"We could none of us be *fit* for any duty or any station in life without the help that my little niece has learned to seek. She will have wisdom and strength given her, I do not doubt, for every trial and every emergency which may meet her, as well as power to use all God's gifts and mercies with the moderation which will make them blessings. Shall I let you into a secret, Ellie ? "

"I should like it much."

"Well, Uncle Ambrose has been waiting at Stockington a fortnight longer than he intended, on purpose, as he says, to see this business settled before he goes. His heart has been so set on it, that I was afraid he would not have patience to wait till Percy wrote, but would be attempting to

pave the way for a favourable reception of the letter himself."

Ellie laughed, and said she had little suspected what was going on.

"You see, Ellie, we all advised Percy to go back and stay quietly at Springfield for a while, that he might be able to test the strength of his feelings on this subject. On your account we recommended it as well, that you might get settled in your home duties before — he disturbed you by this intrusion," he added, smiling.

"Ah, beware what you say, Dr. Forrester! I am glad he *did* wait, though, for I could not have enjoyed my happiness as I do now if it had come before Mama became so much better."

"Well, I must see her, and then hurry away," said the doctor (dreading any appeal to his opinion of Mrs. Woodford's state). "I daresay before night you will have the whole family from Castle-place here disputing who shall have the first kiss of my youngest daughter."

CHAPTER XLIII.

PERCY'S first visit to Ellie with all its gilded hours was over. Autumn was closing in, and daily-diminishing sunlight called for early closed shutters, a cheery tea-table, and plenty of evening occupation. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the invalid's time in the great parlour had been lessening for several weeks past. She seldom now came there before dinner, and Sarah's arm supported her as she descended the stairs. Sarah was sole nurse. All that occurred in the invalid's room which might have increased her anxiety was carefully concealed from Ellie. Unsuspectingly she took the part assigned her. She played the little mistress well. To make the general sitting-room cheerful, to see that all domestic arrangements were cared for, to keep the great parlour (the invalid's especial retirement) a model of tasteful neatness, were the objects of Ellie's continual solicitude.

One beautiful evening, just at October's closing, she and Harry had been for a long walk, and hastened their steps as they neared home that Mrs. Woodford might not be kept waiting for her tea.

"How keen the air is, Harry," said his companion, as they entered the garden. "The poor lawn will look dismal to-morrow. Every remaining flower will be cut off, I fear. There will certainly be a sharp frost to-night."

"Well, Ellie, the frost can't spoil everything. It is always lovely here in some way or other. I wish Percy could have come to Wilton instead of our going to Springfield."

"Ah, but you forget what Springfield is to become under my magic influence. Our own dear home, I mean, for that will be the centre of all our thoughts. What a perfect home Percy's ought to be!"

"And *will* be, Ellie, when you are its mistress."

The last words were uttered as the two ascended the steps leading to the terrace; and Ellie, as was her wont, stole to the window of the great parlour and peeped in.

A blazing fire shed its light over the room, flickering on the quaint and pictured tiles which surrounded the grate, glancing on Ellie's piano, and shining full on the pale form of the invalid, whose couch was drawn towards its genial warmth, lighting up, too, Freddie's golden curls as he sat on the rug intent on a picture-book which lay upon his lap. A flood of moonlight streamed in at the great casement, its soft, pale brightness contrasting in wondrously picturesque effect with the fire's redder glow.

Ellie described the scene to Harry, and then led him within.

Freddie was talking eagerly to his mother about the engravings in his book, and Ellie stood looking

at the invalid, while the questions he was putting in rapid succession were replied to.

That moment never faded from Ellie's remembrance. It seemed as if a withering light fell then upon her mind.

So pale! those attenuated features, save only for that crimson spot upon each cheek. So transparently thin the hands. And the eyes! Had that expression come into them to-day, or was it Ellie's own blindness which had concealed it hitherto?

Terrible was the shock these observations brought; but no vibration of its violence must be perceptible to the precious one by whom it was caused.

"I fear Freddie has been tiring Mama a little bit," Ellie said as soon as she dared trust her voice to speak.

"I haven't. She isn't tired. She's been lying there all the while, and Sarah said I might come."

"Not on purpose, dear, I am sure. But perhaps talking may have tired her."

"Freddie has not been here long, Ellie. Rachel read to me while Sarah took him for a walk, so I have been very quiet. I will be so again now. You will not see me so weary after tea. That meal always revives me astonishingly."

Ellie hastened to get rid of her walking-dress, and soon was in her place at the tea-table, whence she despatched to the large parlour, by Sarah's hand, a tray, the contents of which might have tempted the most sickly appetite. No one guessed, as they heard the cheerful tone in which she spoke,

how dark a shadow had just spread itself over Ellie's heart.

Mrs. Woodford had not overestimated the probable effects of the day's most refreshing meal on herself. She smiled cheerfully as Ellie entered the room when it was over, and looked so much revived that her anxious child began to hope she had been needlessly alarmed.

"You see I told you correctly, my dear. Tea has revived me wonderfully. Now I have much that I want to say to you to-night, so take your work and sit down.

"Your father wishes me to tell you," said Mrs. Woodford, as soon as Ellie was seated, "about the man who met with that lamentable death here a few weeks ago. You know, I think, that he was connected with your father's family?"

"Yes, Mama. Papa said a near relative, and once his dearest friend."

"He was his half-brother."

"Oh, Mama, how dreadful!"

"Ah, Ellie, truly it *was* dreadful to contrast what he became with what he had been, with what I could remember him."

"Does Grandpapa know of this?"

"No, we have studiously kept it from him. The poor man was your Grandmama's child, not his. You never heard, perhaps, that she had been twice married?"

"Never."

"Her first husband was an uncle of Mr. Stanfield's. The drowned man (her only child by that marriage) was some two or three years younger

than Freddie is now when she became your Grand-papa's wife. It is painful always to speak of the dead in other than terms of commendation, so I shall make my tale as brief as possible.

"Your father was born; and the boys, as they grew up, became the closest friends. But, Ellie, there was no restraint at home—nothing on the mother's part but the most injudicious personal admiration and unlimited indulgence. Richard was strikingly handsome, and his manners, when he chose, peculiarly winning."

"So Papa told me. But it is difficult to imagine that any one so horrid and debased in appearance could ever have been so."

"He was, Ellie. I was staying—a young girl then—at Dr. Forrester's, and Richard came to announce to Mrs. Forrester that he was the accepted lover of her sister Grace. I remember saying,— 'Then, I'm sure Grace will have a delightful husband, in all respects.'

"Richard was then partner in the Firm of Musgrave and Tiverton; and your father joined it also the year before I was married. I need not dwell on all the wild extravagance of poor Richard's course—which only too largely influenced your father also. The conclusion of it all was, that with Richard folly and extravagance ended in a crime for which he would have forfeited his life, had he been convicted. He, however, absconded, and we were spared that trial. This happened just after your birth, when our own affairs were in sad perplexity.

"The most disastrous part of the story to us

was, that, although there was no *proof* that your father was implicated in the transaction, Mr. Musgrave suspected it, and insisted that he should withdraw from the Firm. Your father could not then show that he was clear in the matter. There were at that time some unfortunate coincidences which gave colour to Mr. Musgrave's suspicions, and your father was too proud to say all he might have said in his own extenuation. He left the business. Debts swallowed up what property he had; and for six years, Ellie, it often happened that, but for the kindness of friends, and, most especially, of Mr. Stanfield, we should have been in absolute want. I became ill, and altogether it was a time to which I never look back, except to give thanks that it is past—a time of clouds and thick darkness, without one beam from the better land to cheer the gloom.

“I had begun really to despair, when Mr. Stanfield heard that some situation was vacant in the Stockington branch of the old Firm. He was anxious that your father should obtain it. He always held the opinion that if your father could once be connected in any way with the business again, he would be able to prove to Mr. Musgrave that the existing suspicions about him were unfounded. Mr. Stanfield interested himself about it, and it ended in your father's coming here. But, when he arrived, instead of the post he had expected, he found that Mr. Musgrave had filled that, and had consigned him to one of a much humbler description. He did not let me know of this till we arrived at Stockington. He was wearied

with many disappointments, or he would never have accepted it. This, Ellie, was the cause of our going into that poor little house in Brooke's-yard, instead of to a pleasant one in the country, as we had both hoped. Had Mr. Musgrave been here, instead of Mr. Tiverton, I feel sure your father could not have remained. But you know how kind Mr. Tiverton has been. He felt keenly for your father in his humiliation, and did all he could to soften it. Mr. Musgrave, on the contrary, was so bitter against us, that I am sure Mr. Tiverton was not less surprised than we were, when the consent came for your father to be placed in the post he now fills. We now know that we owe that also entirely to Mr. Stanfield's persevering efforts in our behalf.

"I have had a letter to-day from your father to tell me that Mr. Musgrave is informed of Richard's death, and of the manner of it. He has had clearly explained to him all those circumstances which threw suspicion over your father's conduct at first. Mr. Musgrave, it seems, is satisfied now, and expresses himself kindly. He is getting old, and your father's business talents are most valuable to him—indeed, he now acknowledges them to be indispensable.

"The nature of Richard's crime kept us in constant anxiety on his account. He left the country at first, and was in South America for several years. He returned just before your father came to Stockington, and, as you know, he came to this neighbourhood several times. You saw him in the park and at Mill Cottage. Our great hope was, when

years passed away and we heard nothing of poor Richard, that he might have entered on a new course of life in that distant land. We soon found, however, on his return, that whatever change there was in him was for the worse ; indeed, that he had sunk into the lowest habits. Few, I think, would have recognised him ; and this seemed our safeguard, although we always feared that in some moment of intemperance he might so commit himself as to bring about an *exposé* of his past history and of our connexion with him. There was one occasion on which I feel sure, had Mr. Musgrave and not Mr. Tiverton been here, he would have been discovered. He nourished the greatest hatred towards both his old partners, though they were the persons most injured by his conduct. All gentle feelings seemed dead within him ; for even with your father and his mother his only thought appeared to be how to extort money. He passed his time in wandering about the country, spending what they gave him. Your father said that he was penniless when he met his death. Nothing whatever was found about him, and his clothes were of the most wretched description. He had, no doubt, come here to get money, but from whence no one knows."

"What a distressing account, Mama ! And I suppose all this was the cause of Grace Pennington's early death, of which I have heard ?"

"No doubt the breaking off the engagement caused it. *That*, however, Mrs. Pennington had insisted on before things came to the worst."

"Well, Mother, you need not talk any more. It is a miserable tale ! I so fear your being

wearied that I think I must impose silence for a while."

"I am not particularly tired, and there is one more thing I want to say connected with this subject. It is the most painful now of all. We have always feared that it was Richard who was the cause of poor Harry's blindness."

"Oh, Mama, don't say that!"

"I fear it was. He was in Stockington at the time of that election, and kept us in constant torture by his conduct. From what we heard at the time, there remained little doubt in our minds that it was he who did the mischief. Whether intentionally or accidentally we could not tell, excepting that his bitter way of speaking of the Tivertons made your father fear it was done designedly, and that he intended to injure some of that family. See, Ellie, what your father has had to bear, and how merciful a providence kept that act, which caused poor Harry's blindness, from discovery! Think what our position would have been had the miserable man been taken on the suspicion of having perpetrated an outrage of that kind, and had other disclosures followed!"

"I do indeed see it all, Mother."

"Look back, too, upon all that your father has done to soften Harry's affliction. Nothing has ever been suggested for his comfort or pleasure in which we could bear a part, to which my husband has not acceded without a moment's hesitation; his desire of course being to make all the reparation in his power for an injury inflicted, as he fears, by one so nearly connected with himself. Now you know his

past history, Ellie, you may conceive what a life of anxiety and humiliation for many years it was. The pain, too, of self-reproach he must have suffered, which was perhaps the hardest part to bear. To you it is given to make up to the dear Forresters for all that their family have suffered through those connected with ourselves. Some distant day—when years have passed by, if life is spared—tell Ann about Richard's death. She need not know it yet. And never mention to any one our fears as to the originator of poor Harry's calamity. I have told it to you because I feel that in your childhood you suffered from sternness on your father's part, and I want that your maturer mind should be able to excuse what often gave me, as well as yourself, great pain. It is all right between you now in answer to many a prayer of mine; and when, my child, you look back on the time when it was otherwise, remember how the poor father has been tried. Loving Harry as you do, never forget how that father's thoughtful kindness has been exerted towards him. Let these reflections, dear Ellie, throw a softening shade over some of the *painful* memories of childhood."

"Oh, Mother! he had a refractory and irritable child to deal with."

"Yes, dear. And that makes the present change more precious to us both. Ellie, amongst all my mercies, which I number up as I lie here so helplessly, there is none greater than this. It relieves me of such a world of care! When I see my darling Freddie clinging to you, and coming to his sister with his little joys or difficulties, and always meet-

ing sympathy and help, I feel that I may relax my too tenacious hold of this my youngest child, and safely leave him in your care. You will watch over him, Ellie, and always let him feel that his sister's home is a place of rest for him. Wise, judicious kindness I see you know how to exercise for his childhood, and you will be instructed in it for his youth and manhood too. If life is spared, before long it will be needful to think of a change for him. When a school is chosen, see that it is one where the greatest things are made of first importance—near your home at Springfield, Ellie, if that can be arranged. But not yet. Keep the darling under your own influence till you are called to the duties of another station. I do not speak this only on his account. I know by old experience the power of childhood's voice and step in a saddened home——”

A low, trembling voice, and lips from which all colour had fled, pronounced the words,—

“Mother. I know what you would say. And, oh! if it is true, may God give me strength to bear the bitter heavy sorrow!”

“He will, darling. And see, Ellie, how He softens our trials to us! How much worse would the coming stroke have been had there not been the gift first of that friend who is now so precious to you. It will be but the separation of a few swiftly passing years at most. Then we shall meet again in sinless, changeless blessedness. Ellie, when I dwell on what God has done in turning my own heart and those of so many of my dear ones to Himself; when I trace out how He has made apparently adverse circumstances all tend to the

one blessed end of calling us to be citizens of His kingdom, I am compelled to offer *silent* praise, for I find no words that will express the overflowing joy and gratitude I feel."

"Mother!" said Ellie, kneeling by her mother's side, "take me with you! Let me go home too. All my earthly joys receive their tone and colouring from you. I never had one yet which did not spring from you, or owe its highest value to your sympathy and love. I sha'n't know how to deal with God's gifts without your guidance. Oh! Mother, Mother, do not leave me here!"

Ellie laid her head on her mother's bosom, and the thin hands stroked the long fair curls.

"He who knows the burden, my own Ellie, will give you strength to bear it. My child will mourn—I know how deeply, therefore have I shielded her, as long as it might be, from the knowledge of this unchangeable decree. Ellie, think who there are will look to you for many days to come for all the cheer that they can hope to have. The sorrow-stricken father; that poor old man, too, needing a loving hand to point him to the Better Hope, and that sweet impetuous Freddie, wanting the silken rein all day; these, Ellie, besides your Percy and his dear young brother. My child would not leave her Master's work on earth till He invites her to a higher place?"

"Mother! I will strive to bear on for their sakes. But, oh! the blank—the fearful, dreary blank—when I have not my mother's side to creep to! Will this weak nature ever support such grief as that?"

“One idol less. One cord which binds to earth snapped here and joined to heaven. Look on it so, my child. And remember, Ellie—for us all—yet but a little while.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

A FEW more weeks of fluctuating hope and fear passed by. The great parlour (still kept sacred to the invalid) was less and less tenanted, and then there came a cold, bleak morning in December.

Ellie started from her sleep, for some sound had awakened her at an unusual hour. The north wind was howling without, and black clouds hurrying across the rounded moon, caused her bedroom one moment to be illumined with half the light of day, the next to be left in total darkness. She listened anxiously. Soon there came a whispering of voices in the passage. Then a hasty footstep, and her door was opened.

"Miss Ellie, darling, come!—come quickly," were the words of dread.

And quickly Ellie came. But now the mother may not tarry even for her child's last kiss. When Ellie reached the bedside, the beautiful tabernacle was deserted, and the freed spirit transported to its rest.

With clasped hands she looked on that wondrous smile which sometimes brightens the face of death,

and which seemed now to shed an unearthly radiance over the quiet features.

"Take me, oh ! take me with her, merciful God," escaped her lips ; and then she sank on the bed in such an agony of weeping, that even the father's expression of grief was stayed that he might strive to speak a word of comfort. It was a fruitless effort, for the voice of comfort changed to one of lamentation like her own.

At last Ellie heard her father saying in broken sentences,—

"She told me——Ellie——that you would——try to be my comfort."

"I will, I will, dear Papa. Give me a little time to weep ; and then you shall see that I remember my——my promise——to my mother."

The breakfast hour found Ellie in her usual place. She was composed. Her father saw how hard the struggle was to force the required food within her lips, yet how she persevered till the needful amount was taken. He knew for whose sakes she was combating her sorrow thus.

Dr. Forrester, with his wife and Maud, arrived before the morning meal was removed. Ellie needed no assurance of their deep sympathy.

When Mrs. Forrester was led to the bedside where no voice of greeting met her now, she became so violently agitated that, contrary to the first intention, her husband took her home with him again, and Maud was left with the mourners.

Ellie penned a few unsteady lines that morning to Percy, and looked forward to his reply as the one star in this dark night of sorrow.

It was the fourth day after the mother's death. The early twilight was fading into darkness. Mr. Woodford was engaged in the great parlour with a clerk from the counting-house. In the dining-room the rest of the family were gathered round a large and cheerful fire. Ellie, with her arm encircling Freddie, her cheek resting on his head, was gazing intently into the blaze. Maud was conversing with old Mr. Woodford; and Harry, occasionally joining in their conversation, or replying to some question put by Freddie.

Ellie alone was silent. Her thoughts were at Springfield. This was the first day she might have heard from Percy. But the post had long been in, and there was no letter from him. She was so lost in thought, that the gentle opening of the door, and the entrance into the room of a new comer, did not arouse her. The others were also unconscious of the intrusion.

The stranger stood watching the group round the fire for a few moments. Then, going quietly behind her, he laid a caressing hand on Ellie's head. She started, and, looking up, uttered an exclamation, which, for the moment, was all joy. The next, she leant her head on Percy's breast, and wept almost as bitterly as four days before.

"How good, how kind of you to come!" were her first spoken words.

"Where was my right place, Ellie, but by your side in sorrow! Did you not *know* I should be here to-day?"

"Oh, no; I never hoped for that. I had been missing a letter, certainly, since the post came in

to-day. But I was sure there was some reason why you could not write. I didn't know, Percy," she continued, taking his hand in both her own, "that even *you* could have put joy into my heart now. Yet it is there. It has a healing influence, even to look upon your face."

Percy now endeavoured to give a turn to Ellie's thoughts, by telling of Mr. Chester's work at Linton and Ferndale. It was wisely done. It brought to the young mourner's mind remembrance of the spiritual destitution of her own beautiful village, and such thoughts arose as these :—

' Might not even I do something for them? Might I not honour my mother's memory more by active zeal amongst the poor neighbours whose homes surround her body's resting-place, by teaching them to seek a refuge in that blessed world where now her spirit lives — than by useless, selfish grief? '

These thoughts seemed to bring with them hope and energy. Much the idea was pondered, often brought to God in earnest prayer for guidance; and then—

" With heart new braced, and set
To run untired love's blessed race,"—

she prepared herself to pass the remainder of those days of darkness, and to enter on her yet untried work in Wilton.

" Now, Percy," said Ellie (as the two paced the Grove together, some few mornings after her mother's funeral), "I want to talk over my plans

with you, and to have your advice about them. You remember how pleased the Ferndale people were with the Missionary Meeting? I could not, of course, have anything exactly of that kind. But I have been thinking that if I could get some of the villagers to come in the evening now and then, and have tea in our great kitchen, I might, with your help, Percy, contrive to interest them about the heathen; and then, perhaps, that would lead to something in which I might be more directly useful to themselves. In making this plan, I was not thinking only of our poor friends, but of Grandpapa, and Harry, and my little Freddie. Such Meetings would make a pleasant change for them, through the dreary months which are coming."

"The plan is excellent, my child. But how could I help you?"

"In getting Missionary information, dear Percy. Maud and I together would write out some simply-worded papers, which I would read. I will make old James my chaplain, and Harry my organist. Altogether we should contrive a little service—a humble imitation of Mr. Chester's, at Ferndale."

"All very good, my darling. You may rely upon receiving as much information as can be needed for your purpose. It will gladden Mr. Chester's heart to hear of this."

"I have so much to say to you about him, too, Percy! No; don't go towards the house yet! Let me tell you all that is in my heart now."

"Then the shawl must be more closely drawn

round this dear little form, or I shall have to think of a cold taken through walking in the Grove with me. There! Now, what is there in my Ellie's heart with which I may be intrusted?"

"All — everything that is there, both now and always, Percy! But what I want most to speak of now is, next summer. I am to go to Springfield then, you know."

"Such is my fervent hope, my precious child!"

"Well, Percy, I used to talk about it all with dearest Mother, and make plans, and describe to her how it would all be there, till she would laugh at my pictures, and call Springfield 'Utopia.' But there was one idea which she liked. And now, because of that, it will be so precious to me if I can carry it out."

"And can I help you in it?"

"Yes, indeed; it must be your doing, after all."

"Then, let me know it. I shall not be slow to work in such a cause."

"Why, you know, Percy, how sadly we are circumstanced about a Clergyman. And I could not bear to have that solemn service which is to make us one, hurried over, as I have heard it here and ——"

"And you have thought that Mr. Chester would not hurry it over, and that his presence at that time would be very acceptable?"

"Yes. Do you think he would come?"

"If he could leave home, I think there are things that would give him greater pleasure."

"That is not all yet, Percy. There is to

Confirmation at Stockington next year. You know that neither Harry nor I have been confirmed ; and I have thought that, when we knew the time for this, we might fix that for the other ceremony directly. If we put them close together, we might have Mr. Chester here at both, and you, Percy, too, at the first as well as at the last. Should you like it ? ”

“ My clever little plan-maker ! Should I *not* like it ! ”

“ And there is one more thing yet. If Mr. Chester could be here one Sunday, after the Confirmation, Percy, and before the other ceremony, we might, then, all receive the Sacrament together from his hands. That would be to me a sweet, appropriate closing to my intercourse with Wilton. ”

She added the last words, with fast-flowing tears.

“ Ellie, do you think I am going to take you into banishment ? ”

“ It would be happy banishment to me, if it were so, dear Percy. But it is not because I am going with you, that I think my close intercourse with Wilton is about to end. I am sure, from several things Papa has said since—since *that* day, he does not mean to continue to live here. I suspect he will make the time of my leaving, that of his own departure, too. Mr. Musgrave is continually wanting him in London now ; and this makes his living so far away inconvenient. ”

For some time after the close of this speech, Ellie paced by Percy’s side in silence. He waited awhile for her to speak again ; but, when he saw

her eyes still bent on the ground, in sad meditation, he said :—

“Ellie, you told me just now that I was always to be shown your whole heart. You are not performing that promise, for you are striving to hide a part. There is that anxiety over which you are brooding. Why may I not share that, too?”

“The difficulty would be as great to you as to myself, if I put the anxiety into words.”

“I suspect not. I rather think that I met it in my own mind, as I stood at the door, watching the group round the fire, the evening I arrived here. If so, I dealt with it practically this morning. Suppose I were to say that when I was in the great parlour with your father, two hours ago, I asked and obtained his permission that Springfield should be Freddie’s home, till this time next year, and told him that then you and I together would try and find a suitable school for him somewhere near us. Would this assurance meet the mountainous difficulty?”

“Oh, Percy, you will have a better reward than any thanks of mine could be for this! It is indeed a greater relief than I have words to tell.”

“And I made another stipulation, at the same time, which I think will not be unacceptable to you. Sarah is to be Freddie’s and my Ellie’s dear attendant still.”

“Then, Percy, with it all, I fear Springfield will be a dangerously happy home.”

“We will try to make no idols, Ellie; and God

can bestow on us the grace and power to use our blessings moderately."

A busy life Ellie's soon became. All the day through, every hour had some appointed occupation. Freddie's love for literature had yet to be developed. Still, he submitted with a good grace, during the two morning hours, alone in the back parlour with "Sister Ellie." There she contrived to put pigeons and rabbits, Job and Farmer Smith, aside for the time, and to fix his attention and interest, too, on dull-covered books, without any pictures, and on a slate whereon neither boat nor angler was, for those two hours, ever suffered to appear.

Maud now spent her time mostly at Wilton. Mrs. Forrester did not like Ellie's being left without a lady companion; and, so great a change had her book-loving daughter undergone, that she never now seemed so happy anywhere as at Wilton. Her society was valuable to Ellie. They were no sooner established together, and setting to work on Ellie's "plans," than Maud advised her to devote a portion of every day to actual study, and offered her companionship in it. She assured Ellie that she would soon acknowledge the beneficial effect of the suggestion, in its bracing influence on her mind, and the freshness she would bring from such occupations to higher and yet more important duties.

Harry participated in the advantages of this plan; for he was still at Ellie's side, in all her occupations, and rejoiced unfeignedly in the affection which was gradually springing up between herself and Maud.

Mr. Woodford had easily been persuaded to consent to Ellie's proposed Meetings in the great kitchen. Maud was indefatigable in transcribing such selections from the information Percy sent as in their consultations she and Ellie decided together would be most likely to interest their uninstructed hearers. Old Mr. Woodford was equally zealous in seeking out scattered cottages, and inviting the inhabitants to the Manor-house.

A clear, frosty night and brilliant moon favoured the first of Ellie's Meetings. Rachel's kitchen looked a model of neatness and comfort for the reception of the humble visitors, and before six o'clock all the inhabitants of the Manor-house were congregated there. Ellie looked anxiously about to see that ample provision was made for the largest number of guests that could be expected. She soon had the satisfaction of greeting her friends from Smith's Farm, followed by Job. Then, in quick succession, came twos and threes, till at last even the spacious kitchen seemed full. Freddie was delighted, and threaded his way about, pressing the people to eat, and hearing in return many more compliments than were either judicious or desirable.

All his life afterwards, Farmer Smith loved to tell of that first Meeting in the old Manor kitchen—how beautiful Ellie looked with her pale, sweet face, and mourning dress, as she told of heathen darkness and of that Saviour whose presence could make light in every dwelling. There was breathless silence as she read the string of touching anecdotes selected by herself and Maud. When all was over, and Ellie was bidding her guests farewell, one hoary-

headed patriarch ventured in modest phrase to say, "We'd like to come again, Miss, and hear some more. We don't mean only for the tea, though that were *very* good. But to hear tell about them foreign parts, and the missionary gentlemen."

The Meetings, therefore, were continued, and all that Ellie had hoped soon followed.

"We're as bad as them poor heathen, Miss. We wants teaching just as much. If you could please, Miss, to look in a bit now and then and read us a chapter, we'd take it very kind."

Ellie needed no second such invitation. Her father's little Bible in her hand, Harry at her side, she went forth day after day. From the early dinner till dark, she passed from cottage to cottage, out of that holy Book dealing the precious grain, to bring forth fruit in its season—ears and sheaves for the great harvest day.

Freddie's romp in the great parlour, of which she never suffered him to be disappointed, followed her return home. Then came the quiet evening meal, when village plans were discussed, and the joys or sorrows of the rustics were related with kindly sympathy. In these, even little Freddie soon learned to be interested, bringing his store of information too.

When Ellie had seen that darling's head laid on its pillow, there came books grave or entertaining for the refreshment of all. Maud and Ellie read by turns, while old Mr. Woodford and Harry busied themselves with their works of handicraft, all chatting together in the intervals of reading.

So passed by the heavy months of winter—a time

which might have been spent in unavailing sorrow and oppressive gloom, the mourners fancying the while that they were paying a tribute meet to the memory of the beloved one who was gone. More wisely and more faithfully was she mourned—yet how deeply let none doubt. “My mother!” Ah! that had been the heart’s great cry throughout those winter months. Yet Ellie had so striven truly to honour her mother’s memory—to remember the promise given to her to comfort and guide the dear ones in her home—that when Percy made his last visit at the close of March, his spirit was gladdened by the sights he saw. The delicate bloom on Ellie’s cheek, and the expression in her eye, told how wisely the time since they last met had been occupied.

Maud, too—how changed was she! How happy and joyous the little motherless Freddie! How quiet and content the poor old man, so dependent now on others for his comfort!

The Manor-house presented a pleasant scene still. Loving, orderly, earnest in duty, was each spirit there—a transcript of the mind which chiefly ruled over all. Ellie’s father said, as he shook hands with his future son-in-law at parting—the last parting before the wedding—“Percy, I feel little disposed to ratify my engagement with you for June. I would rather keep my Ellie where she is.”

CHAPTER XLV.

SPRING came—beautiful, hope-inspiring spring drew on at last.

What young heart could withhold its echo from the gladness around? Not Ellie's. She drew too large a portion of her earthly happiness from nature to meet the sights and sounds of its revival unmoved by joy herself. Her days of mourning for her mother, indeed, were not ended. But she had learned to rejoice that with that treasured one all tears were wiped away, all fear of change was for ever laid to rest. If sometimes there was a yearning still to see her mother in her old accustomed place, to hear her voice and meet her loving smile, ringing through her heart would come those well-remembered words—"Think, Ellie, darling, for us all—yet but a *little* while."

It was not long after Percy's departure, at the close of March, that Ellie received an early call one morning from Mrs. Tiverton.

"I've come at an unusual hour, my dear," she said, "and I know you are engaged. But I thought you would forgive the intrusion for once when you learned my errand. I have heard from Mrs. For-

rester that she is to call you 'daughter' in June, and I and my girls want to relieve you of some of the needful preparations—the plain parts, at least. The external and ornamental you and Maud will manage best. You know we are all great people with our needles, and Susan, who has set her heart on helping, is the greatest of all in that way. We must begin at once, you know, my dear, or we shall not be ready in time. Come into Stockington to-morrow, and spend the day with us, and we will go together and make the needful purchases. Did you hear from Mr. Woodford yesterday?"

Ellie had not heard.

"Then I can tell you some news, though you will hear them from your father by to-day's post, no doubt. He is taken into the old firm. It stands from yesterday—Musgrave, Tiverton, and Woodford again."

Ellie smiled for a moment, and then blushed from neck to brow so painfully that Mrs. Tiverton could not but take notice of her confusion.

"You have heard, my dear," she said, "that 'there was once another name included in that firm?'"

"Yes," said Ellie, in a low voice.

"Ah! it was a sad business. Your father is cleared now, though; and, as you, I dare say, know, the author of the mischief is removed. The miserable end of poor Richard Stanfield must have been a great shock to him."

Ellie looked quickly into the speaker's face.

"We have heard the whole story, my dear, and you may rely on its being safe with us. You see



when Mr. Woodford told the partners of Richard Stanfield's death, he thought it better to give clear proof that he *knew* it to have taken place, as nothing had been heard by them of the poor man for so many years."

"Did Papa mention in his letter to Mr. Tiverton when he was likely to return home?"

"No; and one thing I imagine connected with this partnership arrangement which will be painful to us is that Mr. Woodford will have to live in London. Mr. Tiverton and I were talking it over last night. He says Mr. Musgrave is so infirm now that he will want your father constantly at hand. In case of Mr. Musgrave's death, the London department would be Mr. Woodford's appointed place. Therefore it is, you see, only a question of time under any circumstances."

"And the poor old Manor-house will be empty again, and look neglected and forlorn as it used those long years back."

"*We* want that it should not, Ellie. Mr. Tiverton and I are getting old folks now, and we think that when it is decided for your father to live in London, we should like nothing better than to come and end our days quietly here. It is stipulated that Ramsey shall join the firm at Christmas; and as he has long fixed upon a wife, we shall give them up the house in Stockington. It will be sweet to each of us to have so much around us here which will remind us of the happy years you passed at Wilton, and of the friends with whom we hope to be reunited another day, though the little band is to be broken now. But come, we must not be sorrowful," she

added, as she saw the tears which Ellie strove to conceal, rapidly chasing each other down her cheeks. "The winter of your deep grief is over, my child. It has been well employed, and you will be permitted a time of refreshing now, I think. Remember your engagement with me to-morrow. The carriage shall be at the ferry at ten o'clock. Give my love to Maud, and tell her we must have her judgment in making the purchases. Say to your grandpapa that Mr. Tiverton will fully expect him, and you know wherever you go Harry goes, of course."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Tiverton. It is very good of you to undertake all this."

Throughout the winter Ellie's brain and fingers had been busy in devising and making a store of clever articles, some pretty, some useful, intended as parting gifts to all those she had loved and was about to leave. No one was to be forgotten. With the marvellous neatness and dexterity of finger she had acquired at the Rectory each article was finished. She loved to take these remembrances, as they were completed, and put them in her mother's room. With the tears which would not cease to flow whenever that silent chamber was entered, many a thanksgiving now was blended, for the blessing which had seemed to rest upon her efforts since it became untenanted—that there was, indeed, she trusted, a monument rising above that precious dust in the churchyard which would be found standing when earth's perishing memorials had all been swept away.

Time was hastening on ; and when, one sweet

Sabbath morning early in May, it was announced at Wilton that the Bishop of the diocese would hold a Confirmation in the parish church of Stockington on Thursday, the 16th of June, the great change seemed so close at hand that Ellie half shrank from it in fear.

Thursday, the 16th of June. Then Tuesday the 21st, perhaps, would be the day when she would look her last (at least, for a long time) on beautiful Wilton—on her mother's grave!

Ellie wrote to Percy, renewed her petition, and eventually received the reply she desired. Mr. and Mrs. Chester, too, if nothing untoward should arise to prevent, would come with Percy the day before the Confirmation, and remain at Wilton till Ellie and Percy had left it together.

About this time another letter was put into Ellie's hand, one which had been tossing about for many weeks on the Atlantic. It filled her heart with gladness, for Phoebe Willett was the writer.

The sheet was large, thickly written upon, and crossed all over. A detailed account of the voyage out, the welcome home, and of the kind of life which Ellie's old companions were leading in that distant land—such were the contents.

"We live near each other, dearest Ellie"—so ran the latter pages. "The extremity of Papa's estate joins Mr. Arnold's, and we often meet. We are trying to do a little with the negroes. Annie and I have each a class of black children, and we hope gradually to do more.

"I wish you could see Lina's kindling eye, as I speak of our corner in the Rectory schoolroom,

and your place there, and the hours we all spent together in it.

"But oh! Ellie, there was a scene the other day—I have never, since we parted, longed for you so much as when I stood looking upon that.

"We had gone over one evening to see the Arnolds. We found Annie in the house, but Esther was not there; and while Lina was chatting with the others, I said I would go and look for her. I walked round under the verandah, and, as I was about to turn the corner of the house, I heard voices, and stopped a moment to listen if I could distinguish Esther's. I did so, and went forward. She did not appear to have heard my step; and, though I felt that I was being a little dishonourable, I could not help drawing behind an orange-tree where I could see without being seen.

"Esther was bending forward in an earnest attitude. In her lap lay the little Russia-leather needle-case—that school treasure, you remember it, Ellie—and open in her hand was the 'Prescription' which you gave her that day just before your Ferndale holidays. (I think I should have known that slip of paper anywhere; one edge had a rim of black, and the pencil had marked irregularly dark and pale alternately.) An old negro sat on the ground at Esther's feet, his hands clasped round his knees, and his eyes fixed on her face with an expression which made even those uncouth features look attractive. I heard her telling him of the sweet young English girl who lived far away over the sea. I heard her say what joy it would be to that dear friend to meet old Juba in heaven. Then

she explained the 'Prescription' in such simple, earnest language as would have gladdened your heart, Ellie, to hear. I could not disturb them. I stole back unperceived. Esther does not know that any but herself and Juba were witnesses of that scene. But, Ellie, what joy for you to think how your example and influence may spread! How many, through the Spirit's blessed work in you, may hear the glad tidings in this far-off land, and rejoice together with you when we all meet in heaven at last!

"Write soon, my own dear friend. Tell me all about yourself, your sweet mother, and your beautiful home. I am thirsting to hear that Ellie has still a lively remembrance of Rectory days, and the friends she made there, whom I know she so truly loved."

Ellie was not slow in giving the challenged assurance of continued interest in school days, or in sending Phœbe a letter as detailed in its tidings as her own. How much there was to tell! Many days elapsed while the sheet was gradually filling, in Ellie's few spare moments. But what a treasure it proved when it reached its destination!

CHAPTER XLVI.

MAY had no sooner opened than Ellie received a letter from Rose, telling her that Mrs. Lister seemed so well that Aunt Jessie would venture to leave her, and therefore that she as well as Rose hoped to be present at the wedding. They would be at Wilton several weeks before it was to take place, that they might assist in the preparations.

“So, Ellie, in a fortnight more you may look for our arrival. Write at once; tell me all you mean to have for the coming event, and then leave it all in our hands.”

Ellie was glad to “leave it all” in the hands of her aunt and sister. She stipulated, however, that the wedding-dress itself should be a Stockington purchase, and of her own choosing. Concerning the rest, she gave Rose a *carte blanche*, to be filled up at her own and her aunt’s discretion.

Ellie had determined on having her bridal feast to resemble as much as possible that one directed last year by her mother, on her own and Harry’s return home. The day was to be made, as far as



possible, a holiday to the villagers of all ages, and Rose was to be superintendent-general of every department where taste was concerned.

"But it will make so much business for you, Rose—too much," said Ellie, one day, when the arrangements were under discussion.

"Oh! no—I like it. As for the decorations, I have certain plans decided on in my own mind, and Emma Tiverton and her brother have promised to come early the morning before the 21st, and to stay all day to help me in carrying them out. I shall press Aunt Jessie and Maud into the service as well."

"It was fortunate for us," said Ellie, "that Paul Tiverton happened to be at home just at this time. How helpful he is! Every day he comes on some kind errand or other."

"He really is," said Miss Lister, "the most agreeable and obliging young man I ever met with. He was at home when we were staying here three years ago, and I then thought there could not be a more delightful person."

"Which proves clearly, Miss Lister, that you had never seen my brother Percy!" said Maud, with assumed gravity, and a glance towards Ellie.

"They are so different," said Ellie, laughing. "It would be impossible to compare them. I dare say one day a lady will be found who will consider Paul first on the list. Even I am willing to place him second."

"That is truly generous. Rose, do let us hear your opinion on this subject. Don't you think

your sister Ellie the most magnanimous of girls ? ”

But Rose remembered at that moment something which must be done upstairs directly. Giving an inaudible reply to the question, she hurried away, leaving Maud with a smile on her lip and a mischievous twinkle in her eye, which would have astonished Ellie had she happened to observe it.

A few mornings after this conversation, Ellie said at breakfast that she was going into Stockington to see Mrs. Tiverton, but should keep the object of her visit a secret till her return.

“ Urgent business, Miss. Elspeth Woodford ? ” inquired Rose, with a little deepening of the colour on her cheek.

“ Yes, it really is, Rose. If I am so fortunate as to be successful in my mission, you will rejoice, I am sure, as much as I shall.”

Arrived in Brooke’s-yard, Ellie inquired for Mrs. Tiverton.

“ She’s up in her own room, Miss, I believe. I’ll tell her you’re here.”

“ No. That is just right. I will go up to her there, for I want to see her alone.”

Ellie ran upstairs.

“ You are the very person I was wishing to see,” said the old lady, after an affectionate greeting. “ I meant to drive over to Wilton in the evening.”

“ Then I am sorry I have come, if my doing so will prevent your visit. But, dear Mrs. Tiverton, I felt as if I must come to you with my

difficulty; for it has been making me anxious ever since you told me about its being necessary for Papa to live in London. I have never ventured on the subject with him. It is about a home for him in London, I have been ruminating. Is it necessary that he should live at the counting-house there?"

"Curious!" said Mrs. Tiverton. "I was coming to you about this very thing myself."

"Then I am sure there is hope in the distance! What a comfort and blessing it is to have such a friend as yourself!"

"That does indeed sound promising," Ellie added, after listening eagerly to Mrs. Tiverton's plan. "May I write to Papa and suggest the idea to him at once? Perhaps he could move a little in the matter even before he returns home."

"I thought of that. As the '21st,' Ellie, is drawing near, it will certainly be better not to delay. And how are the preparations getting on?"

"Oh! very well, I believe. But Rose is managing everything. By your kindness and hers, I am left quite free to follow my own devices. Rose is imposing a great deal on Paul and Emma."

"They seem to enjoy it thoroughly, at all events. Paul's interest in the proceedings is quite amusing."

"He is very kind, and a great help. Now, good-bye, dear Mrs. Tiverton. I shall go and write to Papa directly."

Ellie hurried home, and then proceeded, in a

long letter to her father, to relate the substance of her interview with Mrs. Tiverton.

Her idea met with Mr. Woodford's full acquiescence. Thus, as for little Freddie's future comfort, so for that of her father and grandfather, Ellie's cares were laid to rest.

The day fixed on for Mr. and Mrs. Chester's coming drew near. Ellie had her mother's room prepared for them. Percy's head-quarters were to be in Castle-place.

All Ellie's store of gifts was completed now. But they had yet to be fastened up and directed with her own hand.

The fifteenth of June—the day before the Confirmation—she set apart for that pleasant, but still sad occupation. A little book of heavenly counsel was added, in some instances, to her own handiwork. A word of love, or exhortation, or encouragement, was written on the envelope sheet of each gift ; and the long summer day was really closing, before the last seal was impressed on the very last packet.

“And now, Sarah, you must find me some large receptacle for all my gifts. Then you must keep guard over them, and not let their existence be suspected, till the moment, in next Tuesday, when you receive the word of command from me.”

“And I'm sure, my dear, when it is known, I don't know whether it will make them all most pleased, or most sorrowful.”

“I know they will be both, Sarah. It would break my heart if I thought they would not care

to lose me. I am sure it has gladdened it to work for them all."

"Percy and Mr. and Mrs. Chester are almost at Stockington by this time," added Ellie (turning to Maud, who stood by). "Oh, Maud! what a dream of wonder all the past and present seems!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

Two sacred rites were over, and a third was just at hand.

Ellie and Harry had, together, in God's house, "renewed that solemn promise that was made for them at Baptism;"—had, together with other dear ones, in the quiet church at Wilton, served by the hands of Ferndale's faithful Pastor, eaten of that Bread, and drunk of that Cup—memorials of His Flesh and Blood who died to save.

And now the Wedding-day had come.

Seasonable had been these preceding services—just what was wanted to support that sensitive young spirit through scenes which were now to follow; enabling her to realize that she had been granted a name and a place in that family over which the Highest watches continually.

The sun was getting up, on the twenty-first of June, when Ellie's eyes opened, for the last time, on her little bedroom at Wilton.

She raised herself, and looked around.

A beautiful wreath, formed by her own hand the night before, when all had been sleeping, lay near the window. Blossoms of purest white,

entwined with the Myrtle's dark and glossy leaves, composed it ; and now an early sunbeam played on the sparkling water where it lay.

Ellie's eye turned presently to a watch—her Father's costly gift the night before. The hands told her it was four o'clock, and she quickened her movements at the sight. Rapidly putting on some garments, and throwing a large shawl about her, she shook the glittering drops from the delicate wreath, stole noiselessly downstairs, and out on the lawn. Crossing the dew-covered grass, she stopped before her *Rose Céleste*, and, severing a vigorous offset, she hastened with it to the green mound in the churchyard.

Not a sound was stirring ; not one wreath of smoke from a cottage chimney was to be seen. Clear, and bright, and lovely, has broken the morning of Ellie's marriage-day ; and, all alone, she has gone to plant a memorial of it on her Mother's grave.

"I will give it into Emma's charge," she whispered to herself, as carefully she made a rooting-place for the young tree. "She will be sure to watch and tend it well."

Ellie gazed upon the little shoot—a long, thoughtful, earnest gaze. When she had placed it according to her desire, she laid the wreath beside it—gently and tenderly, as if the beloved sleeper beneath might know that it was an offering to herself ; and then, falling upon her knees, she poured forth her heart in prayer, upon that sacred spot.

Her face was wet with tears, as she slowly rose. Lingered round the grave, with loving,

clinging thought, she gathered some blades of grass from off it, and returned — as noiselessly as she had left it—to her own room again.

The house lay still in silence. Not a sound told her that any eye but her own had yet looked out upon the day so long anticipated with mingled hope and fear.

It was still early, and some hours must elapse before her presence would be needed. She had stipulated for entire solitude that morning. No one but Sarah, she knew, would intrude on her retirement. She now, therefore, cast aside the incomplete dress she had adopted, and lay down to rest. Her previously short night, and subsequent early movement, caused her to feel more fatigue, when her limbs again pressed her couch, than she had been sensible of before ; and she soon fell into a tranquil doze, which lasted till Sarah came to rouse her.

Rejoicing in the quiet she had secured to herself, she opened her casement, and inhaled the breath of honeysuckles, which came stealing in with the morning air.

Ellie felt so calm in spirit as to be a wonder to herself. Only when some fresh remembrance of the tender care of her Heavenly Father crossed her mind, a tear trembled in her eye. As the morning wore on, she watched unseen, or listened to, the movements within and without the house. Quite early she had heard Rose's blithe step passing and re-passing in the passages, and her clear voice giving half-whispered directions, which increased in energy as the hours stole away.

From her window, Ellie saw the village-girls, with garlands thrown over one shoulder, and the boys, with their white rosettes and nosegays, come from the house, just fresh from Rose's hand, trooping together in the churchyard, to await the signal for their forming into the prescribed lines through which the wedding-guests would pass. Following them, came lassies six, in new dresses, and decorated with especial care. These were to stand in the porch, and strew flowers at the Bride's feet, as she left the church. Rose had been indefatigable in training them; and Ellie thought there could not, in its way, be a prettier sight than they presented, as they proudly advanced to their waiting-place.

On the lawn, the servants and their helpers were moving briskly about, placing and arranging the tables, under the especial direction of Miss Lister and Mrs. Smith.

Voices presently began to be heard in the great parlour below, and, soon after, Sarah came to Ellie, saying,—

“Miss Ellie, darling; it's a quarter to ten, and I've come to help you. A good many of your friends are here; and I heard them say, as I ran upstairs, that *another* party are just crossing the ferry.”

“There is little to do, Sarah—just my dress to fasten;—and then I shall be ready in five minutes.”

A dress of transparent muslin, snowy white, and wholly without ornament; a scarf, of soft and delicate crape, of the same pure tint; a gipsy hat,

plaited by Harry's hand, with no other decoration than a broad white ribbon ; an exquisitely-arranged bouquet of blossoms, from her *Rose Céleste*, fastened in her girdle—(memento, as she designed, that there were battles yet to fight, and victories to win),—was the costume Ellie had selected for her wedding. The long, fair curls fell over her shoulders, and half shaded her face, still. There had been some talk of these being confined within more matronly bounds before the Wedding-day. But, when Percy was consulted on the subject, he repudiated the idea so promptly and decidedly, that no one spoke of it again.

“ Ellie, my dear child, I have come for you. All the rest are gone on to the church. Are you ready ? ” said a voice at the door.

“ Quite ready, Papa ! ” replied Ellie, opening it herself, and receiving a tender salutation from her father. Then, taking his offered arm, she went downstairs, and crossed, once more, the gravelled pathway. None knew that she had traversed it at an early hour that day. But the beautiful wreath, lying on the green mound, caught her Father's eye, and he was well convinced that that was Ellie's work.

Between the files of smiling faces and bright garlands, Father and Daughter crossed the church-yard, and entered the sacred building—filled to overflowing now—where every eye was turned upon them. Mr. Chester stood, waiting with open book ; and Percy, near him, watched the advancing pair, with a fixed and earnest gaze.

Ranged around, in order due, were relatives

and friends—all attired suitably for the joyous, yet solemn occasion. No finery, no dazzling colours, or fashions extreme, were there. Soft bridal tints, and garments suited to the wearer's age, did true "honour" to the scene.

With a slightly trembling step, and eyes bent down, Ellie walked up the aisle, and was placed at Percy's side. There, "reverently, discreetly, soberly, and in the fear of God," these two plighted their troth—promised to love, to obey, to cherish; and were pronounced man and wife together, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Clearly through the little church the Pastor's voice rang out; and fervent was the tone in which the blessing was pronounced:—

"The Almighty God pour upon you the riches of His grace, sanctify, and bless you; that ye may please Him, both in body and soul, and live together in holy love unto your lives' end."

Then, still kneeling side by side—one now in that holy bond, as long before in heart—they listened to the closing exhortations; each raising, as they were uttered, an inward petition that in them the true meaning of the wedded state might be shown forth, and all its intended blessings proved.

Surrounded, as they turned from the spot where they had knelt, by a crowd of loving faces, each eager for an embrace, Ellie sought out her father first. Her cheek was pale, and her lip trembled when she tried to speak to him. Perhaps there was another caress and blessing which, with keen

remembrance, she at that moment missed. It might be so. But long before each outstretched hand had been shaken, or warm salute returned, the tremor had passed by ; and when Percy led his bride through the porch, she gave a smiling greeting to the little maidens who strewed the path with flowers. Too sweet those flowers were to tread on, she said ; and stooping down in defiance of all bridal propriety, she gathered up a handful, and told the delighted children she would keep the blossoms all her life in remembrance of them.

The wedding guests were now scattered about ; some in the grove, some in the house, to leave the lawn free for the preparers of the feast.

The results were unanimously pronounced to be perfect.

The table under the mulberry-tree for the bride and her friends was decorated wholly with white flowers ; that spread on the opposite side of the lawn for the poorer guests, with the brightest the gardens could produce, all arranged with exquisite taste by Rose's hand.

Garlands of ivy, festooned from the outmost branches of the spreading tree, partially concealed the bridal table from view, and formed the enclosed space into a leafy tent.

Harry sat at Ellie's right hand with a joyful smile on his face listening to her description of the scene, and deciding with her (as they might have done in the grotto some eight or nine years before) that there never had been so pretty a wedding feast as this ; while the guests, in "aside" remarks, were equally agreed that rarely might be seen a brid

lovely as the young girl who now, with such a sweet and winning grace, received the honours of her bridal day.

When the repast was over, the company spread about in little groups, and Ellie joined one and another in turn, so that she might feel there was not one amongst her wedding guests with whom she had not exchanged loving or kindly intercourse that day.

All at once she missed Rose's clear voice and merry laugh. She looked around, wondering that her sister was not taking her accustomed part of striving to entertain those who seemed least entertained. But becoming absorbed in a chat with Mr. and Mrs. Tiverton about her father's new home in London, the fact of Rose's absence presently passed from her mind. After a while she stole away from the throng that she might secure a few moments alone to look her last on the garden at the back of the house—that pleasant spot with its broad grassy pathway, and grave old yew-trees beneath which she had so often paced, linked to her mother's arm.

She had just reached the door which opened on the greensward path when she heard a quick step behind her. Supposing it to be Percy's she halted, and looked back. She saw not Percy, but Paul Tiverton, and she now suddenly recollected that with him alone of all her guests she had not as yet exchanged one word since the feast was over. She fancied that perhaps he had come to reproach her for forgetting him; and she resolved to make up for the remissness of which she had been guilty by an extra amount of kindness now. He came up to her

just as she stepped out amongst the yew-trees, and hastily closing the door of the house behind him, said,—

“Ellie, forgive me for following you. I know you wish to be alone. But,” he added, taking both her hands, and looking into her face with his kindly, pleasant smile, “I must hear you call me ‘brother’ once to-day.”

“Paul!” said Ellie, extremely puzzled.

“Ah! you have been too absorbed, I see, to observe what was going on around you. But, Ellie, I have the joyful news to tell that it is now *my* Rose as well as yours. Not an hour ago her promise was given. Some days since I obtained your father’s permission to speak to her, but I reserved my suit till now that I might do all the honour it was in my power to do to Percy’s and Ellie’s wedding-day, so that if your dear sister should smile on my petition we might in years to come link the remembrance of our own happiness with yours.”

“Thank you heartily, my ‘brother,’ for the wish which kept you silent till to-day. May the blessing which has been so solemnly invoked for us, rest in equal abundance on you both as well! I thought just now, as I sat at Percy’s side and looked on the scene around me, that I had wellnigh everything my heart could hold of earthly blessing; and now you have brought me this!—What *can* I say to Him who so makes my cup to run over with His gifts?”

“Your life will speak as it has already spoken, Ellie.”

"God grant that it may speak!"

"And that ours may one day bear a testimony as clear as yours has done to the might of religious principle to chasten and sustain in joy or sorrow."

"Raise your standard higher than that, Paul. We must urge each other on—be one in heart and mind in the highest of all senses, as I trust always in things of lesser import. Have you told Percy this good news of yours?"

"Not yet. I came first to you. Rose is with Miss Lister. But, Ellie, I must not intrude longer on your last hours here. I have told my tale, and I must leave you now."

"And if, Paul, in the hurry of departure presently there should be no opportunity for my saying all that my heart dictates to dear Rose, will you say it faithfully for me to-day?—and to-morrow my pen shall do the rest."

"I will. Good-bye, dear Ellie. Think of *us* always when you are *best* employed."

Ellie found but little space for solitude. She was leaning on the white railings, looking musingly into the orchard, calling up old scenes enacted there, and thinking of the disclosure which had just been made to her, when she felt an arm put round her.

"Ellie, is the meditation over?"

"I think it has hardly begun, dear Percy, yet. You are not the first intruder on my privacy. Paul Tiverton has just left me."

"Left *me*, you mean. I have this moment parted from him, and have come to rejoice with my Ellie over the news he has told."

"Is it not good news? And then to think of his keeping his secret till to-day on purpose to do honour to us! Oh! Percy, how pleasant it will be for us all, throughout our lives, to think of the double blessing which has crowned this day. But now tell me how soon we must really go, for I have much to do yet."

"What is it my darling has yet to do?"

"All my parting gifts to present," said Ellie, turning her face quickly away from Percy's gaze. "Quite an hour's work. I shouldn't like to be hurried in that."

"You shall not be. But I would recommend your beginning now."

And drawing her arm within his own, bride and bridegroom trod the grassy pathway beneath the old yew-trees together.

Ellie turned and gave a backward look as they were about to enter the house. One sob of anguish escaped her lips, and her bedroom only saw what followed. A quarter of an hour afterwards her voice was heard summoning Sarah; and the presents, all so carefully packed and directed, were brought on the lawn.

Greatly surprised were both rich and poor when she stepped up to one and another saying in a low voice,—

"Will you keep that for my sake? I made it on purpose for you," or some like sentence which lent especial value to the gift.

There were no smiling faces now. Each one received his packet in silence or in tears. Ellie herself trembled more and more as she went on;

yet it was only by the downcast eye, and the voice scarce audible, that her inward emotion might be traced.

When the last packet had been given, Percy whispered to his bride, and she withdrew.

A few moments alone restored the calmness which the ceremony of distributing her gifts had interrupted. A word with Rose, a kiss on her glowing cheek, and a long gaze into her joyous eyes, lighted up again the crowded picture of Ellie's earthly blessings. She looked on it, and eye and lip soon told that thankful love was banishing the clouds which the parting scene had been spreading around her.

The wedding guests gathered on the bank of the beautiful stream. The ferry-boat was gaily decked with flowers, and Job pulled the bride and bridegroom over. But the strong arm seemed to have lost its nervous power to-day. The movement lacked its wonted regularity; and Percy saw that many a time in that short voyage the rough hand was raised to the weather-beaten face.

From the carriage-window on the opposite shore the throng on the Wilton bank saw a fair face stretched out. There was a smile—a hand was waved—and Ellie drove away with her husband.

* * * * *

Shine and shadow fell by turns upon the loving home at Springfield.

In time the sound of little pattering feet, and baby tongues, and ringing laughter mingled sweetly

with the household's graver tones. But whispering amongst them all, there ever ran a murmur, low and monitory—an answer to the old, old question, “Will there ever be anything *quite* right in this world?”

Ah, no, Ellie. Nothing perfect here! But you have learnt that long ago, and wait content.











